






SPEAKING OF HOME



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**SPEAKING OF  
HOME**

**BEING ESSAYS OF A  
CONTENTED WOMAN**

**LILLIAN WAINRIGHT (HART) TRYON**

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## SPEAKING OF HOME

### I

#### *On Being a Housewife*



T would not be precisely true to say that the housewife is out of fashion to-day. Indeed, with all the aids to housekeeping worked out by modern science and sociological theory easily accessible, it is taken for granted that every woman manages her home in the same casual but thorough way in which she goes to church, knits, or plays bridge. By all means, competence! But as for enthusiasm? — that is another question. The wife and mother of these days is expected to be efficient in her housekeeping, as a matter

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of course; but a little scornful of that efficiency, as though being a housewife were a minor incident in a varied and useful career. The only women who dare to say aloud that they like housework, are those whose professions make it impossible for them to do any, notably actresses and singers. These, we learn through the indiscretions of their press agents, resort to the life domestic as a relaxation from sterner duties! We are even permitted to gaze upon them as, having served a dazzled world in their higher, public capacity, they toss a salad or season a curry for their friends.

But for the woman in private life, the fashion of the hour is to "extenuate, conceal, adorn" the daily task. Science has provided the apparatus for making the drudgery of actual house-

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work lighter. Woman herself has deduced from these helps a gospel of evasion. If she can be spared some of the toil of her profession, why not all? Why not run the household upon a scheme of efficiency that will portion out the work among experts and specialists? These are the specious suggestions of some who frankly say they were created for a higher mission than attending to the physical needs of their families, but who overlook the fact that physical needs are attended by metaphysical. Thus, at one end of the financial scale, a woman, hating the humdrum, and eager for the thing she knows as culture, mitigates her dish-washing with reading, her book propped up by dishes. At the other, she hands over her house to a professional housekeeper and becomes a virtual boarder,

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so as to have time for all the opportunities for self-advancement that the city offers. There are desert wastes between these extremes, of impersonally conducted households, where things move on wheels that seem to go, after a fashion, of themselves, in a cool dry monotony of routine efficiency; where the orderliness is stiff and impregnable, and where the menus are repeated.

There are two difficulties with this very superior attitude. One is that it is pharisaical. It regards all cheerfully domestic souls as inferior; and looks upon our great-grandmothers, whose homely qualities found activity enough in their own houses, with a condescension little short of scorn. But those high-minded dames, at once delicate and vigorous, have left plenty of valued evidence of housewifely prowess: of



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skill in handicraft, of taste in china and furniture, and of strong common sense in bringing up their families. If they were to speak for themselves, I can fancy that both scorn and pity would be cast back upon the generation of to-day.

The other is, that it leaves out of the reckoning altogether the pleasures of being a housewife. I hasten to enroll myself among the unfashionable in this respect. Personally, I find it the most varied of occupations, the most human of trades, the most absorbing of pursuits. I am not, I suppose, to be counted among the domestic women. I do not spring to the dish-pan with the zeal of the enthusiast, nor do I sing pæans of joy at the prospect of a morning's baking. The New England woman made famous by Miss Wilkins, who loved a

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long straight seam to sew, I have great sympathy with; but family sewing is not all straight seam! Some things I am quite willing to do by proxy. It is the profession as a whole that appeals to me.

If a housekeeper does not develop amazing versatility, it is not the fault of her work. When I hear of artists as being versatile, I think of the training I am getting, and wonder how much more practice I should need before I could be hailed as one of those bright stars. Sometimes I think it would be a rest to take the place of the lady who is billed to change her costume in one minute between scenes; for she has to be versatile only a few hours a day. The housewife's lightning changes are complete, taken for granted, and ever fresh and new. Either the changes are

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so abrupt that she does a kind of mental hopscotch, or the stir is so constant that her head seems to hold scrambled brains.

However, I welcome those shifts of attention; they keep the mind alert and sympathies alive. Any comfortable sense of mastery one may have achieved in another profession, is suitably chastened by the variety of the ideal for the housewife. But in addition to these improving reasons, I find the variety in itself delightful. It is like going on a little journey, to drop one task and take up another of a different sort. The work that lately filled the horizon slips from view, and is for the hour forgotten. New faculties come in play with each change. Dexterous fingers, strong hand and arm, enduring back and legs, all take their turn for the house.

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The intellectual demand is no less diverse. The plea of the evader that women were made for something better than home life does not hold here, since the opportunities are greater than any woman can live up to. For the modern wife and mother is presumably her husband's intelligent friend, and her children's playmate and guide. She is, consequently, expected to be a Person herself, and not a mirror. So her reading, small in quantity though it may, more often than not, have to be, ranges naturally enough from current events to nursery rhymes and adolescent psychology, touching whatever will be of service to her own inner life. Happy modern woman, whose study and reflection, far from being a selfish indulgence, are part of her housewifely duty!

One of the most exacting and amus-

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ing intellectual tasks I have, as well as one of the most diversified, is the planning of menus. Consider how one has to call upon information, taste, knowledge of human nature, in performing this bit of routine. I have got to assemble a series of meals, economical, digestible, intelligible, and persuasive; which will use up certain remnants agreeably, combine specific food values, tempt certain varying appetites; which will besides all this have a certain æsthetic quality; and behind all that, will keep within fixed boundaries of cost. I am not so sure that it does not bring into use some spiritual qualities as well!

Certainly, a housewife is in a very human kind of business; she cannot escape from people. She has humanity in her own family, naïvely off its guard and defenseless; humanity guarded and

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wily, showing a crafty face at her door, to beg or to sell; humanity at work for her in all its diversity. She learns to enjoy folks of every sort and in any condition. Many a good story comes to my house with a bargain in its hand, and I never turn it away unheard. I am afraid I might miss something; the truth or falsity of the story does not in the least affect the entertainment it gives me. So with the people who work for me; they make my handbook of applied philosophy. I have stored up more maxims from a shrewd and thoughtful Scotchwoman who, through many ups and downs, and varied experiences with social workers, has yet managed to keep her independence, than from many a wiseacre book. And no wit between covers has ever made me laugh more spontaneously than an

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unlettered Polish girl, who had a gift of sunny humor and trenchant phrase better than much learning.

Much learning used to impose on the housewife, who had it not. But no longer does its swagger of superiority awe her. Having some knowledge herself, she is prepared to count it as but one among the nobler gifts of mankind, no more worthy of honor than the endearing traits that make people interesting and reliable to live with. Surmising, from her wider experience, that as a nation we are prone to overestimate sheer brain-power, she lays her influence in the other side of the balance, for the ethical qualities.

But — the drudgery, they say. Yes, the drudgery! There is plenty of it, enough to discipline the most frivolous soul, even when all the aids to house-

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work are installed and busy. And it is always there, waiting. It is inescapable, whether it be the drudgery of actually doing, or of administration and oversight. Drudgery is a tool of the Devil of Discontent. Yet I say, why not? There is drudgery in every profession, though the kinds may differ; and there is little to choose between one kind and another. If I must drudge, let me drudge with my own things, for my own family, and in my own way!

They say, too, that housekeeping is a stay-at-home occupation. Well, and if it is, there are those who like to stay at home. It is pleasant to live in an environment of one's own making; to work amid quiet surroundings; to care for the sights that greet the eye when one stops to look. There are six fat pigeons nodding about on my neigh-



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bor's lawn. Against the blue of the noonday sky, the elm branches throw their fretwork, growing filmy with leaf buds. Already the lilac hedge is dotted with tiny arrowheads of green. Inside the house, there is the feeling of familiarity, of association; and the sense of being a part of all life, — of somehow fitting into a place in the world's scheme. It is pleasant, too, to have the world brought to the door. Things come to my hands daily from the ends of the earth, to do with as I will. My daily labor of planning or executing transmutes the tropics into action, and makes the Orient's wealth of humble use. Am I less useful to humanity, in my turn, because my chosen profession keeps me at home, instead of sending me forth each day? At least, each day I prepare others to

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go forth and be useful. Physical fitness and spiritual poise they must get at home. They need some one. I am humble. Their necessity gives me all the scope I need.

## II

### *On Keeping House by Ear*



HARLES LAMB said he had no ear. Sometimes I am inclined to think that none of us have, except for the obvious and conventional use of listening to music, and the purely utilitarian one of getting communications from the rest of the world. It is rather dull of us, considering that sounds and voices are as much a part of our environment as are forms and colors. Fortunately, however, cultivating "an ear" does not necessarily mean learning to play or sing. Some people cultivate theirs by sallying forth at awesome hours of the morning, with opera-glasses and bird-books. Though their looks belie

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them, they go to listen. The songs that may have awakened them in many a spring dawn, they are only becoming aware of, by this painful process. But it is not necessary to get up so early, or to go so far afield. There is, as every one who lives in a house knows, enough noise at home! In fact, the house is the very place to educate one's listening powers, because its sounds are so various, and at the same time, so familiar.

It is more than a little amusing, for instance, and sometimes more than a little puzzling as well, to trace sounds to their sources. This makes listening a kind of game, in which guesswork is one of the chief elements. Sometimes memory and association play tricks upon the ear. Things are not what they sound like; and you score one against yourself. But practice increases accu-

racy, as well as keenness of hearing. I can imagine a housewife becoming so expert that she knows what sounds to listen to, and what to disregard, and can with some certainty account for unexpected noises.

I am going to practice keeping house by ear. I have visions of tripled efficiency, when I shall become so perfect in the art, that I can read and knit, or darn, and at the same time follow the course of human events downstairs with sufficient exactness to interpolate warnings or encouragement at just the right minute.

When for any reason I stay in one part of the house for a few days, I find the monotony of my surroundings considerably enlivened, so to speak, by my ears. Without leaving my room, I follow the household routine through

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the day, by turns guessing and criticizing. Some mornings begin cheerfully, and some peevishly, as fretful slam or hearty clatter tell me. I know when the kitchen fire has kept well, and when it has not, by the sounds the range gives forth to its shaking-down and replenishment. The crackling of sticks tells a different story from the quieter snapping of coal. Preparations for breakfast come up to me, in my temporary remoteness, as sound; though smell helps me to note the exact stage at any moment. I feel sure an undue partiality is being accorded to the laying of the table, it is so long a-doing. The top is off the milk bottle at last; and I recognize the sounds of bread-knife and butter-crock. When will the cooking begin? Ah, the bacon-pan! It always strikes the edge of the shelf with just

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that noise. The eggs are evidently to be fried, this morning; I hear them sputtering. There is a silence when they're boiled, and a scraping and stirring when they're scrambled, and a great fuss of egg-beater when they're getting ready for an omelet.

The noise of the dishes is rather brisker at breakfast than at other meals; but conversationally considered, it is a quiet occasion. Even at my distance from the table, I perceive the note of bracing for the day's adventures in business, school, home, and society: the short, crisp question and answer, the alert tones, the unceremonious pauses.

I do hate to hear dishes badly piled for washing. When spoons clank on bowls, and knives and forks mix up in heterogeneous fashion with china

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and tins, I have visions of nicks and scratches that make me want to descend in might, and rescue the helpless things from the hand of the spoiler. On the contrary, nothing in the work about the house gives me such a sense of housewifely comfort as the sounds of orderly procedure with the dishpan. It is a task both rhythmical and musical; and there is a ring of finality when the pan is at length hung in place, that indicates the satisfactory completion of an act of the daily drama.

Cooking by ear I do not altogether recommend as having any certain prospect of success, even when the hearing is keen with specialized practice. The ear does sometimes give warning in time to avert catastrophe, as, if one is near enough to hear it, in the case of the raucous bubbling of a kettle boiling dry;



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where the warning to the other senses would have come only when the mischief was done. By ear, also, one can tell almost to a stroke when cake or muffins have had beating enough. But there is no warning bell to announce the proportions that go into the mixing-bowl, and the oven has no voice to proclaim its temperature. If I cannot be on the spot, and have a share in the pleasant alchemy of stirring together in a dish a lot of strange-looking powders and liquids, consigning them to the fire, and presently drawing forth, not what went in, but a something quite understandable, savory of smell and appetizing to behold, then I do not want to be responsible for making things turn out well. Directing, or even assisting, by ear, may not only bring a culinary disaster: it may be the cause of strained

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relations with the member of the family who actually is on the spot. For in their cooking rights women are naturally jealous and exclusive, melodramatically demanding all, or nothing.

It does not take a very wise housewife, however, to know the sound of her own utensils. Even two or three rooms away, and occupied with other things, she names the noises from her kitchen, and pieces the information they give her into a logical sequence. True, one cannot identify a dessert by its sound, as one might a tree by its bark, or a flower by its scent. But a tolerably good guess can be ventured of the cook-book division under which it falls, based upon the combination and arrangement of the cooking-noises. Everything that can be called cake has one characteristic sound, — the quick,

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regular beat of the spoon at the end of other variously arranged noises, succeeded, after the breathless pause of filling the pans, by the irrevocable slam of the oven door. The rolling-pin, with its alternating raps and grumbles, betrays the pie, unless the children have demanded cookies. As for custard, who that has ever known it can fail to recognize the peculiarly resonant stirring, the slip, slop, of a mixture at once thick and thin! The sounds of bread at the kneading are like nothing else that goes into an oven. With squeaks and sighs, the soft dough yields to the coaxing wrist, at once caressing and compelling; while a stiff dough makes a hard kneading, till the board gives and creaks under it like an old sleigh. Meat gives some sign of what is being done to it, by its hissing in broiler or oven,

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with a sudden crescendo when the door is opened.

The sound of vegetables falling into the pot has an interrupted rhythm which is only in part due to variation in size, and largely to the preferences of the peeler. I believe nobody has ever peeled potatoes without choosing them, one after another, until no choice was left. Why this process of selection, when all must eventually be taken? But then, for that matter, why do we so often strongly prefer one utensil over another practically identical? I have known women to be annoyed to a point of helplessness because they had mislaid a favorite kitchen knife. I long cherished a cracked mixing-bowl, and sat in dread, when I heard it used by others, for fear it might finally be done for; and with equal decision I dis-

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liked an unoffending, if unattractive, spoon of my kitchen collection, and rejoiced when it was taken out to the sand-pile and lost.

When I am about the house, taking part in the work, I am of course conscious, among other things, of the rhythmical qualities of housework. But when I stay apart from it, and listen to it, it comes to seem all rhythm, both in the larger sense of regular recurrence of tasks, and in the repetition of sounds with insistent ictus and pause. Ironing, for example, is nearly as pleasant to listen to as to watch. Not by one stroke of the iron, but by many, is the linen polished and the cambric smoothed to a satin daintiness; the blows follow one another, now slowly, now fast, like the drum-beat of some strange march. There is rhythm in the kitchen; rhythm

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in the dining-room; and in all the work of setting the house in order. Even the vacuum cleaner has a pulse. This rhythmical quality of housework must be the reason why so many women hum or whistle about the house. Old hymns and sentimental songs seem to be the most popular for this time-beating purpose; and from the cheerfulness of voice with which the dreariest of sentiments are expressed, I suspect that the subject has less to do with the use of a tune, than its rhythmical adaptability to the deed of the moment.

Most soothing of all household rhythms is the swish of the broom. It is gentle, and low-keyed. It takes my attention from other things, and makes me think of abstractions. I wonder whether there is not some mathematical calculation by which a ratio can be

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established between power of stroke, length of arm, and good-will. And so speculating I sink into comfortable depths of nothingness.

The voices of family and friends, when they drift to me from another part of the house, tell me a different story than if I were in the room with them. When I cannot hear words, or see faces, I find the voices themselves telling me secrets. There is a picture of temperamental condition in quality of tone, and of physical condition in its elasticity or drag. Vibrations and overtones even give some account of the intellectual qualities; and inflections express attitudes of mind as well as words can. Facts, however, must be supplied by the imagination. I could invent high comedies and high tragedies from the sounds of voices

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that are very likely expressing the most prosaic of ideas!

The house itself has voices, which speak most clearly in the quiet hours. Things have their individualities of sound, as well as of looks. The click of a latch, the light echo of a floor beneath a footstep, are enough to summon a vision of the room from which they came, so different are they from any other grouping of noises in the house. Almost as much might be said of the sound of any piece of furniture at being touched. How well one knows the cracking of each willow chair from that of all the others! Old furniture, I have a notion, has a mellow tone, like an old violin; while the new sounds sharp and clear. The house in its entirety is, in fact, resonant, like a big sea-shell. It gathers up individual sounds, and gives



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out a rich, composite murmur, which swells and subsides again as doors open and close.

Accidental noises break in upon this peaceful harmony, never, no matter how persistent, making a part of it. The slamming of an unfastened shutter, the dripping of a carelessly turned faucet, are always obtrusive. I feel sorry for a house that is left alone, with anything to drip, or rattle, or otherwise disturb its quiet. Equally out of place are the sounds of things put to uses they were never intended for, like the anything not a hammer which serves a woman to drive a tack with.

The feeling of home is made up of many elements; and the voice of the house is one of them. A small and quiet lady, whose journeys abroad had usually been terminated with the going

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down of the sun, once went a-visiting, her courage all summoned for a week of sociability and sight-seeing. But she begged off, the morning of her second day. "The crickets made me homesick," she tearfully explained; "they sound so different from the crickets at home!" Her ear was keen enough to tell her that the familiar sounds, with others, strange to her, in combination with them, made a wholly strange effect.

Every house, in fact, is individual, from the hollow ring of the earth upon the path to its door, to the least of its noises within. I should know my own house, if I were brought to it from the uttermost parts, and set down in darkness. No other house, no matter how pleasant or how powerful its voice may be, sounds like home.

### III

#### *Abolishing the Parlor*



YOUNG farmer, sitting opposite me in a city-bound trolley-car one morning, was discoursing to an acquaintance upon his new house. What he said, inevitably overheard above the bumping of the half-empty car, at first interested me less than the man himself. I liked him for being so frankly a farmer of the old-fashioned type. He did not appear ashamed of the distinction of an outdoor complexion and a country fashion of dress. His cheerful voice and rural accent sounded through the car whenever it stopped. Because of all this, I was, perhaps unwarrantably, startled to find that, when build-

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ing was under discussion, at least, his ideas were of the most advanced.

“On the bungalow style,” he was saying, as one jolt brought a moment’s silence; “and all the improvements. We swapped a sightly location for one on the lower road, where we get the water and gas from Woodfield; and I guess we shan’t be sorry. We’ve got a house big enough for the children to grow up in, too. There’s a reception hall, a living-room, and a den on the first floor, besides dining-room and kitchen.”

I heard no more. Now, some people, whether of city or country, fit perfectly into the “bungalow style” of house, with all it implies. But some do not. By all the arguments of suitability that man should have had a parlor and a sitting-room in his house. What could

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he do without them? I fancied him at his ease, sitting in a rocking-chair beside a red-covered table with a hanging lamp above it. He would be out of his character in a living-room. It occurred to me that perhaps he could not find an architect to make him a sitting-room and a parlor; or had they built rooms of the old type, and rechristened them with new names? I wanted to look into his living-room and his den and his reception hall. Had he scattered his parlor about in the three, or had he put it all into one?

The country parlors of our grandmothers' days would not have yielded so easily to a new-fashioned name. Parlors they were, in every sense of the word. Little or big, they were stiff and stately rooms. Who that has known it will ever forget the aromatic and faintly

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musty draft that stole out when the door was opened, and the dim light that made mystery within? Once inside, there was the table with its lamp set in the midst of a tinted foam of crocheted mat, its books laid exactly across the corners, and its bits of ornament, each with a little family story that even the children knew. There were the slippery chairs and the sofa, whose stiff springs would not yield to the little weight of childhood, but sent us bouncing off; the secretary with its important air; the mantel adorned with a clock that only went on state occasions, and a pair of vases filled with everlasting and dried grasses. I know one such parlor that exerted a great influence on the children who crept in, breathless, to try the springs, and pull at the cords of the shades. They wondered afresh

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at each visit how the beads could have got onto the endless woolly chain of the mat; and gazed betwixt awe and mirth at the woodcuts of Meddlesome Matty suffering the punishments of her inquisitiveness. Dreadful warning to a child even then a-meddling! Plenty to look at and plenty to do, there: all the chairs to be sat on, pretending you were Somebody grown-up, the footstools to be pushed about, the checker-table to be tipped back and forth; there were curious shells to rub bright, carved puzzles to work apart, pretty inlaid boxes, usually locked, to guess about, shake, and if possible, pry open. The pictures, wax flowers, and tidies, offered contemplative pleasures, but were, even to the youthful mind, documents telling something of people, — perhaps in a roundabout way of oneself.

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When, on Sundays, and days of callers, and days of company to tea, the parlor was opened to the light and the air of the ordinary world, and the grown-ups came and went, and sat there talking about things you did n't understand, or perhaps, worse still, about yourselves, the parlor strangely lost its atmosphere of intimate interest and confidence, and turned into a mere unusual background, against which people you knew very well seemed unfamiliar. Such elegant leisure! Such good clothes, fine manners, modulated voices! Such lofty conversations! Plainly, topics proper to working hours and working places were not proper here. If by chance they were touched upon, it was with a grand manner and an impersonal tone that gave them national significance. Privately, while



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I deplored the use of the parlor as a meeting place, I was thrilled by a greatness in my relatives, which in the commonplace intercourse of every day I had failed to recognize. To this day, I do not get them quite back into the perspective. When I recall them conversing in my great-aunt's parlor, they seem larger than reality, as the vision of Creusa seemed to Æneas:—

*Nota maior imago.*

Through many changes of fashion in its decoration, a Sabbath-like aloofness from everyday affairs remained for years the essential quality of the parlor. You might have searched a long time in the parlors of the seventies and eighties without finding a stick of the old furniture. That had gone the way of worn-out furniture, to attics and storerooms,

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via bedroom and playroom. Indeed, plain wooden surfaces and spindle legs did not harmonize with the decorative scheme of a generation ago. Those parlors had an elegance and a grandeur all their own. Walnut frames on steel engravings and mirrors on the gilded walls; lace-covered windows outlined with lambrequins of rep or plush, corded, tasseled, and fringed; rep or plush again on the "sets" of parlor furniture, unless the set was of stuffings and puffings covered with brocade; carpets laid out in geometric patterns, or strewn with garlands; hassocks, and bronzes, and corner cabinets, and richly illustrated volumes of standard history and poetry: all went toward striking awe to the hearts of very young folks, and making them feel their own insignificance in the general plan of society. Yet

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some of us who dwell in living-rooms are not so young but that we remember what a setting these rooms were for childish parties, or for the more sedate festivities of their elders. They were as far away as ever from the daily life of the family, but they were, nevertheless, a pictorial presentment of the luxury and formality that were the social aspiration of the time.

The change in the parlor from luxurious and formal to gay and friendly, was a step bound to be taken sooner or later. It was not, oddly enough, at first in the direction of beauty. It typified a social change toward ease and intimacy. Women began to conceive of their parlors as having romantic possibilities of amusement that should beguile family and friends thither in the evenings. That was the period of Yan-

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kee rococo, — of cozy corners and knick-knacks, of cat-tails and gridirons and milking-stools in places of honor.

I can remember the bustling interest the matrons of our town awoke to, in their own and one another's parlors. Once the door was open, it seemed as if they could not let in light and color and jocundity enough. They "did fancy-work" for the parlor; they painted on china, if they could; they bought bright little pictures of pretty girls and jolly scenes for it. Everybody got to put in it, what everybody else was getting. It troubled none of them that her parlor was much like all the parlors she went into. In fact, there was a marvelous consensus of opinion in one particular year, as to "hand"-painted panels, and scarfs, and tidies. The roses on them might be pink or red, the holly-

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hocks mixed or all of a color, but they were all grown in the same garden. This was due to the activities of a tousled lady calling herself an artist, who had canvassed the town for orders, and had succeeded in convincing each housekeeper that her own individual preferences in floral coloring and character should be set forth upon satin or muslin. The subsequent bursting into bloom of these adornments was greeted by them rather with laughter than with anger. They had a common ideal, but it was not for the display of any possession; they were rivals, but only in making their parlors livable rooms.

We had just got the parlor happily domesticated, when the professional decorator appeared, with advice to sell. His advent marked an epoch for housewives. Sometimes he did not even need

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to go into the parlor, but merely stood in the doorway and said "Not wholly bad!" or, which was even worse, "M-h'm!" He might as well, from the effect he produced, have been the Red Queen saying, "Off with their heads!" Then began the procession to the garret, with milking-stools and easels and gay scraps of needlework, and other articles that showed more of virtue than of *vertu*. Luckily, the things that had to go, were not, for the most part, expensive; so that the Yankee sense of thrift was not shocked. It was sometimes hinted, from one woman to another, that more had been banished than need have been; but the advice was paid for, and therefore to be followed. At all events, in the course of time, without too much upheaval of sentiment and tradition, the decorator

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achieved a few gem-like rooms; and gave the whole community the idea to work upon that there is some beauty in the absence of ugliness, and some in judicious arrangement of things quite commonplace in themselves. When it was known that Mrs. L——'s parlor was done in old rose, with a few water-color landscapes on the walls, and that Miss C——'s contained her grandmother's rush-bottomed chairs, and some tinted photographs gathered in her trip abroad, other women took their courage in their hands, and began on their own responsibility the reform of the parlor.

To satisfy these new æsthetic standards, and at the same time retain the hardly achieved homelikeness, was a task not easy for minds unaccustomed to think of Home in terms of the higher beauty. So, there were many failures

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and some half-successes. There still are. No matter; the thing accomplished was great. Whatever it was or was not, the parlor left off being merely a room in which to receive visitors, and became the expression of a family's composite character and taste. But even thus, when the parlor had reached the point of perfection, was it at last abolished completely; for who can have a room so expressive as these had become, and not want to live in it?

We are fast becoming a parlorless nation. The accidental limitations of space and of service in modern life, and the increased expenses of building, as well as the noble intention of simplifying the house, have contributed to the result. The apartment house began the movement; the bungalow developed it. Even in houses where the rooms are



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plenty and large, there seems to be always some more immediate use for every room than to make a parlor of it. So the parlor, which used to be the most important room, now is relegated to the cold and viewless side, or is crowded into a corner of the hall, with two chairs and a palm.

We could not get our parlors back into their old state if we tried, because we ourselves have changed. The living-room answers to a new social feeling. Life is too full to have patience with formalities. The cry of the times seems to be for few friends and good ones. The living-room is an intimate apartment, where people are at ease with one another; the surroundings suggest talk that is neither superficial nor impersonal. Perhaps the finest thing about it is that it is the man's room, quite as

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much as the woman's. In this age of the feminist, man has come into his own at home. Thanks partly to the decorator, he no longer considers the arrangement of a room a woman's job. The parlor belonged to the women of a household. The men entered it under pressure, assuming for the occasion a festive air, and more often than not seeking an early pretext for escape. But in the living-room, the colors are soft, the lights are good, the chairs are easy, and there is nothing to pull or knock off on the floor. It is a background that permits a man in his everyday moods to retain his self-respect.

Nevertheless, there is a good deal of the parlor still left in our natures. The business of family life, which used to go on in the shabby sitting-room, is managed from some nook far away from the

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living-room. That is a place for leisure. The little imp of logic suggests that when the parlor was turned into a living-room, then, by the same token, the living-room became a parlor. We take kindly to the customs of the living-room, because they follow the line of least resistance; but we welcome opportunities to practice there the graces of the more austere parlor. The parlor was a school of politeness and conversation; in the living-room we have manners, and talk, instead. When the living-room does the best service to this generation, it is not only the center of the family's social life; but it is, even as the parlor once was, a barrier of delicate reticence, hospitable and impalpable but none the less real, shielding the sanctity of family intimacy from the rest of the world.

## IV

### *Wild Grapes for Jelly*



SAW them, among peaches and melons and early apples, on the fruit stand of a Greek. They were set humbly at one side of the brilliant display — a straggly, leaf-strewn heap. Pyramids of domesticated fruits, with their tidy red-and-yellow glaze, put to shame those unkempt clusters, and tame grapes, packed so neatly in their fresh splint baskets, cast scorn upon them. I am always tempted, in the presence of such a show, to handle things, just to see if they are real. How can they be so beautiful, and still be good? I want to dent the waxy pears, that look as if

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they might have grown anywhere but on a tree in a breezy orchard, to squeeze the melons, and to rub the down off the too, too velvety peaches. But wild grapes are intractably themselves. No Greek apron can polish them beyond recognition, no undiscerning hand lay them in parallelograms. What country boy's need for pocket-money, or what chance discovery of keen-eyed aliens, sends these shy fruits to a city market? I forgot the little sallies of the greedy hand, to hover about the corner where they lay. I sniffed their spicy fragrance, weighed a dusky bunch in my hand, picked off a long-legs scrambling atop of the pile, and ended by transferring all I dared of it to my kitchen table.

Now if I were to advise any one as to the best of all ways to make wild-grape

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jelly, I should say, begin by gathering the grapes yourself. This will give you a start in blossoming time, when you can locate your vineyard by its smell, for not all vines that look thrifty bear grapes. You will find occasion to pass that way now and then during the summer, to take a wary glance at those swelling balls of jade beneath the leaves, and to note whether any one else may be showing the same interest. At length comes a golden day, which your heightened consciousness tells you is the very time: while the sun is still hot in mid-heaven, but the wind blows cool against your cheek, with a touch of frost. And you go to bring in your crop. Perhaps you will make the expedition a little family festival, with provisions in baskets, and a book for the half-hour of rest; perhaps it will be a quiet morning

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jaunt with a friend. In either case, the world is well lost, for the time. Lucky you, if that suspected some one has not watched your vineyard a little more closely than you, and snatched your booty away! With what pride in your harvest do you come laden home! What a delighted superiority you then feel toward the scanty spoil in the market!

The sense of intimacy with those grapes goes into your jelly-making, and even, in some mysterious way, into your jelly. It is all your own, from twig to table. For wild grapes are every man's harvest, choosing their own trellis of boundary fences and stone walls along the roadsides. They yield their riches to those who know them best and who most desire them. If you have found them, then it is you only for

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whom they have ripened, a free gift of nature's bounty.

Even though I had to gather my grapes from the fruit-stand, the jelly-making itself was a joy, from the moment I turned the basket on its side, and watched the tiny woodland insects scurrying for cover, to the moment of pasting the labels on the glasses with "Wild" written particularly large and plain. It took me out of the house to half-forgotten country lanes; and brought me home again to visions of little Epicurean feasts I should plan for the discriminating, with wild-grape jelly as the crown — a dainty to stir the imagination as well as please the taste. And what pure, primary pleasures of eye, ear, nose, mouth, and fingers, they offered! The subtle play of colors in the dark globes, turning royally to pur-



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ple as they drained, their bloomy roundness and firmness, their perfume, like that of a sun-smitten vine, their sharp, wild taste, even remembered sounds, song of birds and hum of bees above the wild-grape tangle, these were the material of poetry as well as of jelly.

Indeed, the preserving season is a kind of poetic bypath, enticing us from the housekeeper's daily routine. We gladly leave our well-trodden ways of menus and mending, calls and entertaining, for the rainbow-hued, fragrant tasks that were begun for us with the spring, in orchards and sunny garden-ends. Our bypath is æsthetic, rather than utilitarian. Like the peaceful lanes where wild grapes grow, it leads us out of the prosy region of foregone conclusions into that of experiment

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and adventure. Preserving is always an experiment, and keeps the charm of novelty no matter how many well-filled shelves we have to our credit each season; for there is time between two summers to forget a good deal about the behavior of fruits.

The bypath takes us away from the world into the solitude of the kitchen, made orderly and vacant for our enterprise. I know of no occupation of women more conducive to reflection; it keeps the hands busy enough so that we cannot call ourselves idle, but not so busy that there are no good level stretches of waiting and musing. We stir, and skim, and strain, entertained meanwhile by the troop of little, unrelated thoughts that dance unbidden through minds at ease. When at length we emerge from our secular retreat, it

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is with ideas refreshed, opinions readjusted, provision made for the future, and fruit-stained hands that are rather a cause of pride than otherwise.

Our families undertake their share in the autumnal industry with philosophy, if not with enthusiasm. Prudent eyes on the future, they accept resignedly their sketchy desserts of preserving-days, and show as much interest in the important affairs under way as can be expected of the uninitiated. They pass judgment gravely on the flavor of the fruit, with frequent consultation of the pile, at imminent risk to our carefully considered proportions. They even bend brows wont to frown over more weighty matters upon the little mechanical problems of the occasion. After lively discussion, marked by the pleasing frank-

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ness of expression permitted among relatives, they produce some contrivance fearfully and wonderfully made, but wholly adequate to the moment's need. There is, for example, the ticklish business of "dripping," which the cook-books nonchalantly dismiss with the words, "Let drip." Though, being limited by lack of experience, they cannot see why squeezing is not just as effectual as dripping, and much quicker, they are willing to be indulgent to the feminine whim. But the jelly-bag is big and wet, and not every house is endowed with a hook in the middle of the kitchen ceiling. Some kind of sling is essential. The solution of the difficulty is a subject for the masculine intelligence; and the results are individual in every household. In one, it may be the crane in the old fireplace that answers

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for the sling. In another, an old-fashioned washstand with a hole in the top is turned into a dripping-machine. In still another, an ingenious pulley device is fastened to the waterpipes that cross the kitchen ceiling, and the bulky bag of juice hung therefrom.

Modernism scarcely approves of all this labor. We cannot suppress a doubt as to the economy of expending so much time and care to catch and imprison a few dozen jars of sunshine. In theory, we acknowledge the wastefulness of our effort. We might, perhaps with advantage to the world, be spared this labor and put to some other that somebody thinks more useful. But in practice, a great many of us go on preserving, year after year. In fact, we really love the close boundaries of home, and prefer the work that is direct

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and personal to a bigger work and a possibly posthumous appreciation.

After all, we but take our place in the long line of women who, since cooking was invented, have gathered the fruits of the earth and stored them up for use and comfort. Each year with the ripening of the fruit has this ritual been accomplished, through ages of unwritten history. It is the hereditary harvest ceremonial of womankind, as old as the legend of Pomona. Its incense is the savory smell that floats out upon the soft autumnal air, from the kitchens of cottage, apartment-house, and palace.

## V

### *On Staying Late in the Country*



IN the spring, Cousin Jane declares that nothing will induce her to remain away from town later than the middle of September; and every fall she offers a new and quite sufficient reason for changing her mind. This year she cheerfully admits having no reason at all, but she means to stay, just the same. Her letter announcing the family decision, which is, in fact, her own, contains, nevertheless, some suggestive explanations.

“We shall probably not move back to town till November, though as individuals you may see us earlier, hurrying to or from a train. Don’t ask me

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why! I'm sure I don't know; we have had so many good reasons, year after year, that one will do as well as another. We have stayed for the autumn colors, the autumn weather, for somebody's health, for the garden, — and really it is too bad to leave everything just crying to be eaten, when it has been so much trouble to raise! Sally says that we stayed last year, so far as she could see, for a peck of pickles and a gallon of jelly! The truth is, we are staying because we hate to leave, though I suppose we shall all be homesick, as usual. Besides, we want to do some things to the house."

Cousin Jane's actual reason appeared in her last sentence. She is always "doing something" to that house. Hers is not one of the big establishments, where season is a mere incident, and



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arrivals and departures depend on circumstances more mundane than spring or fall weather. It is a modest, though substantial, summer home, an old house of the kind that takes at least two weeks to put in running order, and as long to close up again, and demands a certain amount of sympathetic attention all through the summer. Like many another woman, Cousin Jane really enjoys the bustle of packing and unpacking, of leaving one house and settling in the other; and she is equally happy when meeting the little emergencies of keeping house in the country. Every year she prolongs the process of getting ready to leave, by some experiment in repair or rearrangement, which she undertakes after summer has been successfully carried through.

Yet even Cousin Jane has, the least

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bit in the world, the air of a martyr in her devotion. Nobody has urged her to stay against her will; but she writes of her plans with an air of conscious and resigned virtue. I have noticed the same air in many who prolong their summer into fall. They elect to remain with Nature as long as Nature is hospitable; but they wish to count their remaining a virtue rather than a privilege. Like those tragic young persons of Romance, who, having committed themselves to a course of action, stand nobly by their word, though they would have preferred, after all, to do something different, they rather expect to be admired for their constancy in abnegation. I imagine that we are all subject to a seesaw of emotions when we stay in the country late, even the most rural-minded of us! We pay

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for our companionship with Nature in our isolation from our kind. Our proud sense of proprietorship in the autumnal glories of our particular countryside is offset by recurrent longings for the paved ways, familiar faces, and the smart autumnal crowds of the city. Rapture may be our daily portion; but despair follows on the heels of the dusk, when the long blank evening shuts in with equinoctial swiftness. We are glad of the brief escape from routine, the summer programme having ended, and the winter not yet begun; but our very liberty from engagements sometimes leads us into the arduous business of "killing time."

There is enough to do in the country in autumn, but the occupations are not those of the summer resident, nor are the events of any social interest. They

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have to do with crops and feeds and animals, with questions of drainage and of wood-cutting. The great out-of-doors is hospitable to its summer colonists; it takes on an air of elegance and ease for them, lending itself as a background for their pleasures, and a source of inspiration in their thinking. But when they take wing for town, the country relapses again into its bucolic aspect. The quiet, earnest struggle with the earth for a living, which goes on relentlessly all the year, gives to Nature again her expression of intensity and long patience. Almost the only reminder of the joyous activities of the summer is their setting of landscape and garden and house — in their turn, it is to be hoped, an inspiration of beauty in living to the country dwellers. Those who tarry behind must

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needs seek new ways of enjoyment; they do well if they learn from their country neighbors to make much of small occasions. Errands offer such occasions, whether they require a visit to a nearby farmyard, or a journey to the next village. So do those long, unexciting expeditions, which no one will undertake in summer, when the days are filled with plans and people.

The object of errand or expedition is nothing; the road offers much. The hub-to-hub conversation in the middle of the highway has added pleasure because you know that in town you would be asked by the police to move on; you put extra vigor into your shouts of cheerful repartee to the man who hails you across half an acre of field, because in town the conventionalities would keep you dumb. The call which awhile

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ago you willingly made brief, lengthens out into a visit, as you listen to local legends, set forth, it may be, with biting humor, or with a power of laconic description that you envy. Along your journey you find the landscape has a charm of strangeness, no matter how often you may have seen it before; since last you took that road, the autumn, advancing, has changed the colors and masses along the forest's edge; little freshets caused by recent rains have spread a lake where not long ago a green meadow lay, and have poured brooks across the road for your wheels to splash through. You are thrilled with human sympathy at the signs of an access of thrift in a poor neighborhood: the rubbish cleared from sheds and dooryards, sagging porches braced, windows mended, — indica-

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tions perhaps that the young people have developed a desire to live well. These are slight incidents, but an afternoon spent thus makes you forget that you ever had a consciousness.

It is for this reason, I suppose, that Cousin Jane finds such delight in her autumn errands. She drives an ambling horse which she cannot be persuaded to give up, because, she says, he is good for her nerves; and it takes a very small pretext to constitute an errand. What she brings back in the way of comment, friendly gossip, and lively little anecdotes, is, it is plain to see, the plunder she most values. She finds an interested audience in her family, who banter her about the length of her excursions and the worth of her booty, but would n't for worlds miss one of her recitals.

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The human value of the country is not clear to those who come and go in the high tide of summer. They take their human relations along with them, or find them in others like themselves. Summer doings preclude learning much about rural neighbors. People at work about their farms easily seem to be a part of the landscape, like the figures of Corot, perhaps, never to be known. But when summer is over, they appear as beings at once less picturesque and more real.

Clothes and attitudes do not dig, and gather, and bind into sheaves, after all, but men. They are ignorant of the intellectual catchwords of the hour in town, but they have a standard of mental capacity which disregards advantages and is curious about power: the old Yankee standard which



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sent meagerly educated men out into great positions, because their power was great. Their fiery pride of democracy being met with respect, they have much to communicate that will stir the best of the social emotions.

But Nature is your bosom companion. People you can find in town. If you stay late in the country. it must be because you love the fall, the most various of the seasons. In no two years does autumn stain her garments with the same dyes; and each new coloring seems better than all the others. Each, too, reveals a different quality in lines of trees and contours of hills; while the blue air through which they shine seems to be the air of another life than this. The fascination leads you on with the certainty of some new mood of beauty each day, and the hope of learning from

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the autumn some new strength of silent purpose.

The paramount question, as the season waxes late, is the question of the frost. This is the universal topic of the farms in autumn, just as the production of somebody's new play is the talk of the town. Speculation is rife, almanacs are quoted, comparisons made with previous years, clouds and winds are viewed with boding eye. Gardens are scanned with care each evening; and if the wind is cool, and light, and north-west, and the sky clear, everything that is ripe, or nearly ripe, goes into the basket. Then, what feasts for a vegetarian! No need of meat imitations, while the frost holds off! Denizens of the well-supplied town, whose chief acquaintance with vegetables has been concerned with the proper dressing to

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be served with them, become students of vegetable habits, in late October. The member of the family who will take the trouble to protect the still bearing plants, where he can, with a light covering, and thus save the fruit for its proper destiny, becomes the family hero. In the prospect of imminent cold weather, the flower garden, too, acquires a novel interest. Flowers so common in summer that they are scarcely noticed except in the mass, are studied as treasured individual blossoms; a rosebud is a family event.

As days grow short, and crickets chirp more rustily, and branches begin to show through the leaves, your thoughts center again around the house itself. It becomes, for the first time in a year, the subject of family conversations, — what you must do to it, what

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you can do, what you could do if you could afford it. The history of the house comes out, as explaining this or that idiosyncrasy in its plan. You discover that it will take kindly to some changes, while others it will not tolerate.

You come to feel that houses are, after all, much like people. Some are mellow, peaceful, easy to live with, and taking kindly to the furniture and manners of their inhabitants. Others are stubborn and reserved, yielding only to persistent effort to understand them, but showing at last a wayward and original charm. All houses are blank to those who do not like them. No expense or elaboration will give them any expressiveness. But no one who stays late in the country can fail to love his house. If he did not love it, he would flee to town!

## VI

### *On Buying at the Door*



HERE are still, happily, some engaging foibles left for the diversion of humanity. We are not yet educated beyond our inconsistencies. When at last we do become altogether reasonable beings, half the fun of living for most of us will be gone. The personal equation, which now amuses and bothers us by turns, will be solved; our little vagaries, through which we give and get many joyous minutes, will be no more. Nothing will be left for us but to be tiresome creatures, stupidly efficient and unhumorously correct.

A pleasing incongruity in modern life, showing that as yet we are neither

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correct nor efficient to any alarming degree, is the presence of the peddler. By all sociological theory and economic law, he should be discouraged from interrupting the peace of household routine, and gently persuaded to adopt some productive occupation. Yet here he is, in proof that buying at the door has survived a certain amount of reasonableness. Progress has not availed against him. He has changed his dress and his wares, but he remains eternally the same. The man who utters solemn warnings upon the scorner of his dustless mop is own brother to that woman peddler of Cumæ, who cursed Tarquin because he haggled over the price of the Sibylline books.

In days of old, the peddler was a picturesque and even a romantic figure. Across the pages of classic myth and

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Oriental tale, through the labyrinths of medieval intrigue and the thrills of modern melodrama, he has passed, sometimes himself the hero, sometimes bearing a tale or a message along with his goods. He was a guest not without honor, and an imposing personage as he sat at ease, commanding his slaves to spread rugs and unroll silks. He had entertainment for empty heads, as well as bargains in the superfluous for full purses. But the ten-cent store and the trolley-car have conspired to diminish his importance and cut down his profits. The glory has vanished from the trade. The peddler now travels humbly and unattended; but his nature is as optimistic and his conversation as grandiloquent as ever. With a little tact and patience you may still buy a story along with your bargain.

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The gay tin-cart has vanished from city and town; the photographer's little house on wheels is no longer a summer-time lure for the young at the edge of the village. But if you go into the country far enough from a railway station or a trolley line, you may see both these and many a snug little wagon besides. There is still need of the peddler in these quiet byways. Travel such a road along a ridge I know, on a morning of early summer, and you may find it a busy shopping street. Groups of little houses cluster along its green edges, like flowers in a garland. At intervals, dust-golden ribbons of roads trail down to the valley below. And up each road as you come to it, creaks a cart or climbs a man. In the distance a tall red cart approaches at leisurely pace; it sways slightly, and mirror-gleams flash out



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from it upon the countryside, in moving spots of light; a moment more, and you catch the familiar musical jangle, as the tin-peddler halts before a house. Here, you pass a brown young fellow trudging merrily, with a bundle of rugs upon his shoulder. No Orientals these, but, from the glimpse you get of a rosy wreath and the mild head of a St. Bernard, gay and serviceable "Smyrna!" A pair of gypsy women stride along swinging armfuls of little bright-colored baskets. All kinds of things are for sale along the ridge road this morning. At a garden's end before a tiny house, a woman holds up to the sunlight a piece of gingham, while the proprietor of the wayfaring dry-goods shop is half hidden from view under the flap of his wagon. The meat-cart and the fish-cart, men with neat small bags and men

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with unwieldy bundles, all are finding customers. As you muse upon the sight, you reflect that these peddlers are carriers of more than their wares. They carry subjects for neighborhood talk, matter for comparison and debate, new ideas of decoration and equipment. The road stretches away for miles; but the automobile whirls you on so fast that the whole long breeze-swept ridge, bordered on one hand by wooded highland and on the other by sun-warmed valley, melts into one panorama of the housewife and the peddler.

After all, the situation is not so widely different, in towns. The city housewife has her regular back-door visitors, with whom she holds daily intimate converse. But, be it distinctly understood, this is a very modern kind of buying at the door! The regular visitor has a

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standing; he is the agent of a reputable firm; he comes with an order-book, instead of a bundle. His admission is unquestioned; his sales are sure. He literally brings the market to the house. Yet, in spite of the air of regularity given to the transaction, the housewife is just as susceptible as her country sister to the beguilements of the creative imagination shown by her peddlers, although to mere moral suasion she may be somewhat more obdurate. How there can be a difference between lettuce and "*let-tuce!*" is a delicate psychological question; but the housewife can measure the difference by her grocer's bills.

Peddlers' packs have changed with times and places. The bags and bundles brought to the city door contain other merchandise than those along the

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country road. In neighborhoods politely known as "residential sections," doggy rugs are no longer urged upon you, nor hair "restorers," nor liniment "good for man and beast," though there are doubtless still customers somewhere for these commodities. China cement and silver polish, those staples of a former generation of peddlers, have been superseded by dustless dusters and patent-applied-for kitchenware, the staples of this. We might infer that the peddler finds us more intelligent and less credulous than our predecessors, were it not for the fact that the dustless dusters usually turn out to be far from dustless, and the kitchenware not what it seems!

If every woman sooner or later falls before the peddler and his pack, in spite of stern household rules and fixed prin-

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ciples, it is largely because of the pack itself. The feminine soul loves a bundle only next to a bargain: because it is neat, because it was made to be undone, because its uncommunicative exterior is fuel to the flame of curiosity. Very likely disappointment lurks inside. I have known most promising packages that held the dullest of things. But there may be amusement, or better than that. At any rate a bundle cries out to be looked into, even when she has bought it herself. And then the mere arrangement of the peddler's merchandise is interesting. The something childlike in her takes pleasure in those tidily fitted rows and tiers of packets, and the neatly folded layers on layers of stuffs. Sometimes she is tempted to buy, just to repay all that trouble of unpacking and displaying.

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The merchandise of the peddler is not like that spread out on a counter, with a trade name and a fixed price writ large above it. It is brought to her, and sues for her favor; she does not go to buy it because it is what she must have. If she buys, she is investing in a bit of mystery. She takes it at its boasted valuation, and chooses to think it cheap if she lowers the original price set upon it, willing to let tomorrow tell her whether she has been cheated. Meantime, she is ready to defend her purchase hotly against masculine jeers and family queries, for it is the visible witness to her judgment of a face and a story.

The peddler exercises his judgment no less. With ready tact he adapts his persuasion to her apparent worldly condition, intelligence, and good nature.

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Buyer, peddler, and bargain thus form a dramatic triangle, with the doorway for stage setting. Here, if ever, is a contest of pure native wit, divested of all adventitious circumstances. What though there is superior information inside the door? It is offset by Odyssean craft across the threshold. On one hand, dignity, security, taste, and a generally sympathetic attitude toward human endeavors, somewhat lessened by suspicion and annoyance in particular cases; on the other, a store of arguments and tricks of the trade, a vast doorway knowledge of feminine nature, and, most potent of all, the nip of the necessity to sell. The balance of qualities is usually good enough to keep the result in question up to the final moment; and whatever that result may be, both sides feel a kind of satisfaction

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in having used their powers against a worthy opponent.

Part of the peddler's cleverness consists in his ability to arouse attention. The peddlers are few who have faith enough in their wares to rely altogether upon them for success. They give plenty of reasons why you should buy, which have nothing to do with the quality of the merchandise. As bits of personal history, these reasons would be interesting enough, if the same story did not have to serve so many people. In the last analysis, all the stories of the trade reduce themselves to variants of four myths.

There is the story of genius unrecognized and talent lost to the world for lack of capital. The man who "makes with his own hand" the little contrivance he thrusts upon you, seems, and



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perhaps is, perfectly honest. But you listen to an already familiar tale of the uncertainty of royalties and the faithlessness of merchants; and in addition, you are expected to find an extraordinary merit in the thing because his hands have made it. Was not this precisely the order of exercises when the vender of salve or cough-mixture called, in the days before little mechanical utilities had caught the public eye? I do not know how many bits of twisted copper wire have been shown me the past year, convertible into how many utensils, for what varied uses. Most of these I have been fortified to resist; one or two I bought, for no reason that I can recall, except Lady Cicely's in "Captain Brassbound's Conversion," that the man had a nice face!

The peddler from foreign parts, with

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his plethoric telescope bag, which he has, presumably, carried all the way, and with a dirty letter from a missionary school for reference, is getting his living, not from his goods, which are commonplace, but out of his romantic circumstances. The man from "Dah-mahs-koos" gravely asserts that all the things he has are the work of a mother, wife and sister at home. Mexican and East Indian tell a like tale, with garnishings of local color from actual experience. So do the little Irish girls with lace. Another plea of the same sort is the appeal of the disappointed Italian immigrant who wishes to go home by a boat "leaving to-night," and who will therefore sacrifice his last piece of real hand-woven linen at a great reduction. Not at all abashed if you meet him again days afterward, he will tell you,

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when reminded of his burning desire to leave these shores, that he lost the boat! The goods really do credit to somebody's intelligence. I have seen the same stuff in Capri; but the story did not work well there. All, of alien tongues, at crucial moments of questioning, take refuge in an ignorance of English as colossal as it is sudden. Though they are only too obviously frauds, you feel kindly toward them, because they are so frank — with their feelings — and so free — with their nods and becks and wreathed smiles.

When boys and girls selling their way through college offer you something you either have already or do not want at all, you are willing to put your name down in their businesslike little books, for the pleasure of watching the light in the young faces, as they find them-

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selves a step nearer the halls of learning. It is with a shock that you finally realize how little difference there is between them and the cripple who begs you to buy a bunch of pencils for charity's sake.

Flimsiest of all peddler's stories is that told by the peddler with a grand manner. He has your name on a very select list of patrons to whom this superior grade of goods, or this special edition, may be shown in the confidence that your taste and culture will approve. Who but the sternest of Puritans might not feel that here was a man of judgment, to whom one might listen without fear of guile! Yet the bargain from one of these transactions is small out of all proportion with the importance given it.

One sometimes wonders whether

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peddling is a profession, or a stepping-stone, or a stop-gap. Do men ever choose it, out of all the trades open to them? Or do they drop into it, as Silas Wegg dropped into poetry, when nothing more exciting offers? To go about the country reversing the economic order and creating a demand for your supply of unnecessities, is, I fancy, not really to the liking of many men. It suffices; it might even become an absorbing occupation, to levy contributions for your support upon your fellow beings, and manage to make them feel happy about it!

Now, anybody can understand liking to be a tin-peddler, or a scissors-grinder, or an umbrella-mender, or the popcorn man. These are independent tradesmen; they fill a real want. They are humanly interesting and trust-

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worthy, because they have a real trade, and they ply it under the windows. But here is where a little originality will go a long way toward success: the scissors-grinder whose outfit is so complete that he can pull out his stool and sit down at his wheel in comfort; the pedestrian cobbler, who carries his patrons' shoes by the strings, dangling them above the pavements they have been wont to stamp or trip or shuffle along; the man who brings you, every Tuesday, potato chips and peppermints and horseradish for your delectation, and who talks to you like a naturalist and a moralist in one — does he read his Thoreau I wonder?

The most idyllic peddler in fiction is perhaps Hardy's reddleman. The most idyllic I ever knew was an Englishman, too, an umbrella-mender who sang a

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little song of his trade as he went his way. We could not resist that tune; and he would set up his stool in the garden path. As he worked in the checkered sunshine, he would sing some old English ballad, while the children hung about him, all eyes and ears. That peddler and man added something to the homely poetry of life; and I hope he knew it.

## VII

### *Piazza Conversation*



S for me, in summer-time give me a piazza nook, with a bit of a breeze, and a bit of shaded sunlight, a bit of a view, and a bit of idle-work; above all, a bit — not too much! — of company; and you may know where to find me. Parties, games, even automobiles, can scarcely drag me from my paradisaical corner. What is better than to feel the cooling wing of a breeze on a warm morning, bringing a breath of sweetness across fields and gardens? Or prettier to see than the swift shadow of a bird crossing the streak of sunshine on the floor, and the bright quivering of sun-warmed air above the meadow



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grasses? What more quieting to the task-worn soul than a glimpse of blue hill or purple-shadowed grove, or of the meeting of rock and sea? Let me share these delights, to make them better still; and let us have talk blown hither and yon as light as the breeze, and as trifling as the insects that hum in the neighboring hedge.

An empty piazza is a sorry sight. It seems to need the stir and animation of sociability, to make it complete as a place of recreation. Perhaps this is because we have been addicted, as a nation, to the front-piazza idea; to such an extent, indeed, that even although the living-porch, with its approximation to indoor habits, has become an integral part of the modern house, and despite the fact that the old front piazza is trying as hard as it can to be a

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living-porch, and succeeding tolerably well, we have not forgotten the ways of the light-hearted and light-clad group that used to take possession in the long summer twilights, or the conversation emanating from the row of rocking-chairs there, on a warm afternoon.

Whatever name it goes by, and the names are many, the piazza has an amphibious character. It is neither in nor out, but on the border-line between the two, with the intimate privacy of the house on one side, and the cheerful publicity of out-of-doors on the other; having a little of the quality of each, without quite achieving either. Though the piazza seems the ideal place for confidences, any one who makes them is tolerably sure of being overheard. On the piazza you have, to be sure, many of the advantages of being

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outdoors and in at the same time; yet you cannot work there, in any sense that the really industrious approve, or play, at any of the healthful and exhausting games which are traditionally known as "exercise in the open air." You really are playing, although you satisfy your indoor conscience with a semblance of industry, or at the least, of sociability. If you have any reason for concealing the truth about your indolence, you can make the piazza a perfectly good excuse for idling or trifling to your heart's content, because it looks so irreproachable.

Its atmosphere, likewise, is not clear, but changeable, and efforts fail to bring the spirit of the place to declare itself. The conversation of the piazza has this ambiguous and fragmentary quality. It need have no beginning, and it does

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not matter whether it ends, or merely drops off into silence. You start a large subject with the comfortable feeling that since there is no time to say anything final about it before you all go your devious ways, one thing will do as well as another; and so you offer the first generalization that pops to your lips. Let the talk thereupon meander where it will, even through interminable flatness, you feel no personal responsibility, and no need to change its direction. The sweet philosophy of letting things go, is the only guide in piazza talk. If, on the other hand, the talk is made up of shreds and patches, no one interferes to hold it together, for no one talks or listens with a view to keeping on with any topic. The transit of the Jones family across the path of vision from the piazza may give

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rise to a collection of comments that appear to have no more to do with each other than they have with the Jones family.

“That automobile is an ice-wagon!” says one.

“They’re going to have a new one, anyway,” says another. “I saw Mrs. Jones at the Browns’ tea, the other day. She is dressing especially well, this season.”

“The Effort cars always wheeze, climbing a hill. I would n’t take one as a gift.”

“I understand Alice Jones is going to marry Jack Robinson, after all,” hazards some one.

“Why not, I want to know? It would be worth something, just to take you around. I am thinking of getting one myself.”

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"Do you really think so? It's not official, and I don't believe it. I have heard, quite directly, that he is going West with his family, this summer."

"Everybody's going to the Exposition this year."

"Really? Then, why did Harry Smith go off and join the Ambulance Corps?"

"Alice did n't know her own mind, I suppose. It was a case of t'other dear charmer. And now, it's neither one! Poor Alice!"

"They say the color scheme is quite wonderful. Gardens and buildings, and exhibits, for all I know, planned to harmonize."

"I'd rather have a Ransack than an Effort, if I were buying a car this year."

"Meanwhile there's that fine young

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porch of the Joneses going begging. Wonder what they built it for?"

"Well, there are days when it's too cold to ride, you know, or when the car is being fixed. And then, that porch has room enough for quite a bridge party."

"Nobody sits on the porch, nowadays, but us. I realize I'm unfashionable, but I like our own view of the point better than any one's else."

"Don't want to look at the same thing all your life, do you?"

Time always passes swiftly — and profitably, you feel — when the affairs of your friends are under discussion.

It is quite sufficient, in piazza conversation, to look receptive when others are talking, and, in turn, to give voice to whatever lies uppermost in the mind, whether it is to the point or not. I

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know people who are adept at listening with their faces only: they look politely appreciative when they are addressed, but all the time their thoughts are humming about in some pleasaunce of their own making. A man with this gift—it ordinarily is a man—enjoys the conversation of the piazza because it makes a kind of orchestral accompaniment to his own private musings; though he has his bad moments, when he is unwarrantably expected to turn soloist, mount the platform, and say something.

If there be a determining factor in the mood of the piazza, it is a gentle and sociable laziness. Logic, consistency, all the qualities that imply mental effort, are in abeyance. The talk drifts, impelled in infinitesimal shoves and pushes by every chance sight or sound.



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The topics may be great or small, the talk is of the smallest. And it is, on the whole, calm talk. Briskness does not stay on the porch; it goes and plays tennis or golf. People who are lounging in couch-hammocks, rocking in broad piazza chairs, or propped by pillows in corners, are not likely to speak with umbrage or excitement. Yet they enjoy being thrilled. They love tales of the woeful and the strenuous, and each piles the agony a little higher. They behold dreadful adventures through a haze of comfort, and think of them merely as interesting pictures, far-off, vague, and impersonal. They even take a kind of "penny-dreadful" pleasure in their vicarious feelings of grief and horror.

Like Tennyson's Lotus-eaters, they enjoy their melancholy. In fact, for its

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brief hour, the piazza makes Lotus-eaters of us all. For the moment, we forget our dutiful pasts and our hard-earned futures, and count ourselves fortunate to be taking breath in quiet.

Where trite comment passes, well enough, for wisdom, and the oldest joke and the slenderest witticism flourish, brilliance is too stimulating. A platitude on the porch is as good as an epigram in the parlor. Here is the great opportunity of Dullness; for nowhere else can so much entertainment be extracted from a trifle. Even the bore may talk and talk; he will never find an audience more submissive. They are too comfortable to flee, and too much under the spell of their Lotus to be critical. But the piazza mood levels down, as well as up. Stupid things are all well enough; but when the do-noth-

## PIAZZA CONVERSATION

ing spirit creeps upon the learned and the clever, they willingly forego any intellectual distinction they may have had, and join the rest in their stupidity. I do not know whether it is more hopeful or discouraging to see greatness take so kindly to being like everybody else. I cannot recall that pettiness adapts itself so readily to being great!

When all is said, it is the intuitive talker who gives the spice to piazza gatherings. His, or her, — and in this case it usually is a woman, — good things are due to flashes of insight rather than to knowledge or reason. She only hits upon something good now and then; but it costs her no more mental effort than to say the inevitable things she probably does say the other nine tenths of the time. The flashes of the intuitive talker cannot be counted upon

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to recur with regularity, — like those of a lighthouse, — but they are as welcome, in the monotony of the piazza conversation, as is a beacon on a murky night.

A childlike, happy reliance upon chance is the key to real enjoyment of the piazza. Talk, manners, and states of mind that would seem awkward or ill-judged indoors, are natural and acceptable on the porch. While these do not go so far as to contradict indoor conventions, they constitute a liberal standard of behavior, which affords relief, and distinction as well, to the code of the house. Easy attitudes, unguarded talk, spontaneous action, are good manners for the piazza quarter of the year. It is a welcome interregnum of whim. For, during the other three quarters, people plan and apportion

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their diversions according to what they call their best interests.

But impulse and whim are traitors; they will disclose a foible which self-control has kept carefully hidden. Thus, among many little frailties betrayed in piazza life, a naïve and good-tempered selfishness is conspicuous. This is no mean spirit, but merely a tendency to secure comfort, — a little calculation in the matter of breeze and favorite chairs; a little independence of others in the matter of occupation, or of no occupation at all. Persons who are otherwise quite reasonable resent infringement of their piazza rights; I have known a serious falling-out to begin with the misappropriation of a rocking-chair. In little things like this, does the eternal child within us sometimes show a pouting face.

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The casual always has its amusing aspects. Much, for example, depends upon the shape of the piazza. If it is long and narrow, so that the talkers are obliged to sit in a row, then you either have a line of confidences in pairs, or a monologue, delivered from the vantage-point of the piazza railing, which faces them all. If, on the other hand, a wide-spread circle of chairs is possible, you have a medley, as loud and cheerful as a treeful of robins at dawn. There are persons, popular and indispensably useful in indoor life, who do not shine on the porch, no matter how it is shaped. These are either too industrious or too active to be really easy there. They bring energy where energy is at a discount, and plans where none are wanted. Nobody pays any attention to them, except to listen with a

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negative politeness when they make some energetic offer. People who cannot be casual need sympathy, but the porch is no place for them.

Summer friendships and summer books are casual weeds. Two or three women with nothing in common but propinquity of piazzas, can make an ordinary friendship look pale. They exchange life-histories, and settle the reputations of the neighborhood; they share their possessions, and take their amusements together. It is a pleasant situation; it looks like the real thing. But intimacies which have their root and blossom on the porch, fade altogether with the first frosts.

I hardly know why it is that books read on the piazza have so often the air of having been picked up in the dark. Surely book and reader do not always

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go together as you would expect them to do; but people often find great refreshment in getting away from their ordinary amusements. There is no inherent reason why a stately lady should read grave books; or why a scholarly gentleman should regale himself, in his hours of relaxation, with treatises that cause the unlearned to quake. Nevertheless, you feel a distinct shock when you find the stately lady's piazza book one that the boys and girls are finding "ripping" and "up-to-the-minute," and when you find the gentle apostle of high thought reading with absorbed interest a sad sweet story of the unsmooth course of true love. If you express polite inquiry, you get explanations — of the vacation spirit, of plot interest in the story, of the need of mental rest. All of which sounds sus-



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piciously like the apologies of the tired business man for going to a musical comedy. Is it so fatiguing to live on speaking terms with one's mind?

The people who frequent the piazza are more interesting than the things they say. People nearly always are. I have fancied that I saw in those who spent most time there an intensification of the piazza mood that amounted to temperament. However they classify themselves elsewhere, on the porch I group them by the way they talk. The most irritating of these, to me, is the sporting type. It is made up chiefly of young, or would be young, persons, clad in spotlessly correct sporting costume, down to the width of a shoe-string, who are, ostensibly, on the way to or from their sport. Finding the porch comfortable, they linger long and

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return soon. No one would blame them for that. I would forgive them when they do not leave it at all, if it were not for the condescension with which they address those who do not pretend to like violence in any form. They expatiate upon the glories of the active life, incidentally alluding to themselves as exemplars of its beneficent influence. The noise of their chatter makes it impossible for more indolent souls to pursue the windings of their thoughts; which are, possibly, quite as interesting as the chronicle of the game. At the other extreme, are those who come to the porch with some slight task-idleness, which leaves the mind free to range afar, on bright wings. Of this type is the man who slowly consumes a large black cigar, emitting wisdom with smoke. I suspect that the Yankee

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who whittled on the store steps was of this type. I used to know a man who measured his leisure by his cigars; and they grew longer and slower of combustion, as the summer wore on. The woman with an intricate piece of embroidery is his feminine counterpart. I readily admit that I choose my position with some care, so as to be near these leisurely philosophers, for here is your real talk. I like the conversation of women sewing; if they ever philosophize, it is when their hands are busy with some not too pressing task. The only complaint I have of knitters is that they always seem to be in a hurry. Fingers fly, and lips move; but eyes and ears are keen, and their comments are always ready. The counting rather adds piquancy to their words. With what art they arrange to count off sixty stitches

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in the middle of an interesting bit of gossip!

Some men, and fewer women, frankly take their piazza straight, as it were, with no adulteration of book, game, or work. In primitive neighborhoods, the men of this type tilt their chairs against the wall, and the women rock steadily. Those swaying rockers! I can see the toes of the occupants spurning the ground as the chair reaches its forward pitch, and dangling a little, as it rocks backward! What better indication of a mind completely idle? And, oddly enough, no one else has the talking power of these idle ones, whether primitive or fashionable. Everything suggests comment to them, which they see no reason for restraining. They get endless entertainment, and give some, out of their fellow beings. Little exu-

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berances of taste, or judgment, or sentiment, are a favorite theme with them, and caricature is their favorite method of criticism. They take very good care to leave no joint in their own armor of correctness and conventionality. I often wish some one would find a vulnerable spot for a keen thrust.

Now, I do not own to the piazza temperament. I am one of those who have not time to cultivate it. And furthermore, I am no devotee of the life of unrelieved meditation. But, I hate to see those desert wastes that once were piazzas. House after house, along any great summer highway, shows its porch, gay with all the trappings of outdoor elegance, — vacant. They have hung their harps upon the willows, and gone a-motoring. There is companionship, and there may be (though I doubt it)

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conversation in the automobile; there is surely pleasure, exhilaration, the uplifting of heart at the sight of the beauty of the world. But we need the piazza, just as much as ever. There, are peace, and quiet talk, and the touch upon the soul of a dear familiar view.

## VIII

### *The Conservation of Shabbiness*



T is an important moment for the family when some one discovers that the house is really too shabby to be suitable, and should have been done over long ago. Some one starts a lively discussion by talking of improvements and repairs that may as well be included in the doing-over; and another adds heat, as well as light, to the situation, by suggesting a decorator, so as to have the job done right. Comments ensue, both respectful and pessimistic: To the effect that the happy days are no more, when those most concerned went blithely to the paper-hanger's shop and chose a pattern that pleased them, re-

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gardless of artistic notions, — a proceeding which turned out as well, after all, as some carefully studied effects that might be mentioned; that, on the contrary, “pleasing patterns” had almost always turned out very badly, but nobody ever dared to say so! and that only a specialist could tell beforehand just how a house was going to look when everything was in place; that, whose house was it, anyway, and one would really like to keep one’s furniture, which the decorators never allowed!

By way of final compromise, it is admitted that, after all, one merely gets the expert’s opinion, and then goes on and does as one pleases. Whatever is at length decided upon, from tearing out and remodeling even to fresh paper and paint, the whole family looks



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upon the impending change as a speculation. They feel that though the house may emerge from the confusion improved and beautified, it will somehow be a different place.

It is astonishing what fresh paper and paint will do! In the presence of that immaculate complacency, our still useful and hitherto unimpeachable furniture seems for the first time to show its real character. Traits appear that we have never before suspected in them. Heavy masses, sprawling outlines, faded or unpleasant colors, — something is sure to crop out demanding instant banishment, or, at the least, complete renovation. Mere comfort is too slipshod and shabby an effect to contribute to an artistic whole. We are obliged to face the melancholy fact that the big chair and the middle-sized

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chair, which have for years been the measure and symbol of our after-dinner peace, have no "air." One who is supposed to know would permit us to keep them, provided they are recushioned with stuff of a modern pattern that would fairly twitter and peck at the occupants; but the same authority hints, in reprisal, that the capacious table and hospitable if unpretending sofa do not add to the tone of the room, and might with advantage be replaced. Thus, the things which have, through long use, become adapted to family idiosyncrasies, pass from the rooms that once knew them, and take their station humbly in remote corners of the house.

Cousin Jane is, for her, rather plaintive on this subject. It appears that Sally is having her own way, at last,

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and the house is in the hands of a decorator. It is going to be lovely, in the end, and will make a perfect background for Sally's social enterprises. Cousin Jane and Cousin John view the plans with pride; but they are already nonplussed about their possessions. In particular, there are an old sofa and an enormous secretary, of no mentionable design, which have held places of honor in the library ever since I can remember. But the library is to be done over, along with the rest of the house. It is going to have one wall knocked out, and another made into windows, and it is going to change its nature and join with the back parlor to make a living-room. It will be sunny where the old room was dark; and, according to the description, finely proportioned where the old room was simply not quite

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square. But it is to be a Jacobean room; and to this Cousin Jane is quite unreconciled. She feels that scorn is thereby cast upon her two dear, shabby pieces of mid-Victorian black-walnut.

“There’s no place left in the house for them; that’s plain,” said she. “Of course, even I can see that they would n’t go in the Adam parlor, or the Dutch morning-room. And John and I both hate the hole we call John’s den, which is merely a receptacle for our Indian stuff, and besides is already full of that hard, slippery Mission furniture. But it would n’t ruin the house, for me, if we were to let those two things stay right where they are. Is Jacobean so very far from mid-Victorian?” She laughed, as, sooner or later, she usually does. “But we’re quite mid-Victorian ourselves, all but Sally! She’s Futurist,

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when she is n't Pre-Raphaelite. At any rate, there's nothing about us that's Jacobite; why should we have it thrust upon us in furniture? They insure you against almost every kind of loss, nowadays; I'd like to have some redecoration insurance!" She reflected for a moment in silence; then summed up her case. "It would n't be so bad to have the house artistic, if I could be sure there was going to be a human corner in it, or a comfortable chair. But I wish the decorators had to sit in some of the chairs they buy for other people!"

I feel for Cousin Jane. She is too affluent to be allowed the luxury of a little shabbiness. She belongs to the large class of those who commit themselves, out of regard for the feelings of others, to a condition of eternal spick-

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and-spanness. The inquiring glances of friends and acquaintances at her old secretary and sofa, standing shabbily in the midst of Jacobean state, would do more to precipitate their removal than much argument at home. We shall never see them again, I know.

But it is hard for any of us to preserve our shabbiness, whatever the size of our bank account. It requires no little courage and self-confidence. All the arguments are against it — pride, taste, prudence even; it seems as if nothing was to be said for it, except the reason which is no argument at all — “Because I like it.” Even that, however, withers before criticism. Let a censorious eye fall upon our worn and out-dated things, and our old happy reliance in them is forever gone. It is only by an effort of will that we

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keep what we fear no one else would have.

That is a pity, for brand-new things have a certain uniformity, no matter how elegant they may be. They may show the taste of their possessors; they cannot reveal their characters until the newness is worn off. A room that is complete all at once is tragically incomplete; it needs the presence of something shabby, something with the dimness of long human association. Most of us from a necessity that is wiser than our wishes, and a few from sentiment, keep something of the past in our new rooms, and leave, also, something for the future.

It is their unimaginative completeness that makes the model rooms of expositions so dreary. One triumph of the decorator's art, in particular, I re-

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member, as combining the blankness of Sahara with an Arctic chilliness. It was not really a room at all, but an artistic success, a study in colors, textures, values, lines, and what not. Nothing jarred, or was out of relation to the whole. Even the *motifs* of the curtain borders matched the design on the pottery jars; and the strip of embroidery that hung from a basket repeated the theme. But it was inconceivable that any one should ever finish that embroidery, or bring bouquets of heterogeneous flowers for those bowls, or move a chair from its position. As for the chairs, they were like fixed stars! Nothing in the room had ever been adapted to any human use.

Shabbiness, on the other hand, is the creation of use. It is achieved through the wearing-down of things by the



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never-to-be-duplicated agglomeration of tastes and habits called a family; and really expresses the family's composite idea of home. How many years of living the process takes! How much of family history is illustrated in its old furniture and worn carpets! Everything is eloquent — a mended chair-leg, the humpy springs of a couch, rubbed book-covers, the threadbare path across a sitting-room carpet which marked the short cut the boys used to take from play to dinner!

Sentiment, habit, and history thus unite in making shabbiness the right background of the life domestic. People may be known by their works, but by the wear they give their furniture they are understood. I am inclined to believe that a man never is understood, until he is seen in relation to his

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own background. For there he has created something which explains him without his intending it. Men feel this more strongly than women, and are less willing to cast out the old for the new. A millionaire of simple habits let the vicissitudes of art, wealth, and his family work their will with the rest of the house, but kept the plain and well-worn furnishings of his own rooms as they had always been. Possibly he felt, what all his friends saw, that they were better suited to his gaunt and angular personality than the brocade and mahogany which might have taken their place. The personal relics of departed great ones of the earth, their rings and snuff-boxes, their coats and shawls, do not tell nearly as much of them as the furniture they have used. Savonarola's robe is but cloth; his desk and stool,

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rubbed to brightness by wear, his thumbed book and narrow bed, tell all we need to know of his daily way of life.

Oddly enough, the furniture that has been a background for interesting personalities acquires an interesting air itself, no matter how shabby it is. It has spent years of its existence accommodating itself to the ways of one group of people; and it shows a dignity of service not to be found in the most finely proportioned new piece. That is why people hunt antiques, I suppose. If they can buy, along with good design and good material, that dignity of use, they put just so much more beauty into their homes. Those who have the money, and the wish, to change their houses, as Cousin Jane was cajoled into doing, send their own old furniture to

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the second-hand store, and buy antiques to suit the style of their remodeled rooms.

And styles do change, there's no denying! The laughable thing about Cousin Jane's discarded walnut is, that some day it will be rediscovered, and dragged from its seclusion in storeroom or second-hand shop. Some one will be redecorating in the mid-Victorian style. The dealer in antiques will be very effusive about its mellowness, and state of repair, and solidity; there will be the jargon about "picking up," and "getting hold of," and all the rest of it. And the new owner will talk about her "pieces," and perhaps give their pedigree. Meanwhile, Cousin Jane will, I hope, be getting used to her Jacobean chairs.

After all, shabbiness is worth pre-

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serving. It is an exquisite quality, not to be parted with for any ordinary kind of luxury. It is slow to win; for the mere domestication of furniture is a matter of years, and things keep their new look for longer than that. Once gained, it is unique, moreover; and as a harmonizing element, it can ill be spared. Like old people, who have learned not to quarrel over minor affairs, but who are nowise obliterated by their compromises, shabbiness brings together under one large kindness styles that differ, and differ perhaps assertively; saving even for the most modest thing a place of its own. There are æsthetic values in shabbiness, too. But beautiful though it is to look at, in its gently blurred outlines and blending of faded colors, it is essentially the spiritual quality that we value, expressive

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of a delicate restraint and pride, of the willingness to forego an easy effectiveness for a slower and more subtle revelation.

## IX

### *On Being too Kind*



AM not often moved to envy men. In general, I am disposed to accept my share of the oft-quoted limitations and prerogatives of my lot rather with amusement than in sorrow or in anger. Why worry about them, anyway, when mere living in such a thrilling business: when the night-wind blows across half the world to the door of my house, and every day the comedies, the tragedies, and the imperishable hopes of other human beings cross and parallel my own? But I confess there are occasions when I do envy men's social independence. At times, when I have exhausted my versatility in

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phrasing polite notes, and my ingenuity in planning menus and prizes, and my tact in all kinds of ways, then I wish I could hide my manners under a cloak of masculine gruffness; and, expecting nothing, have nothing expected of me. I should like to disentangle myself from the endless chain of feminine kindnesses; and I would cheerfully swap the woman's code of thoughtfulness, for the man's, of complete, selfish frankness in social relations.

If, as we acknowledge with pride, kindness is one of our feminine prerogatives, it must be acknowledged also that we have a limitation which goes with it, in our proneness to carry our good works to excess. We are too busy being kind to realize when we are being too kind. Like most of our other prerogatives and limitations, these are



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both traits of our feminine nature, not to be lightly parted with at a wish, or transformed by a vote. As a matter of fact, we attack our kindnesses with the same thorough-going zeal with which we conduct all our daily enterprises. We love to be doing things; and are never quite so happy as when we can complain of having too much to do.

Ever since Penelope's day, women have worshiped the big endeavor in everyday affairs. Heroism in little things is their daily practice. The insignificance of the duties upon which they expend their strength and talent does not trouble them; the mere size of a cause never stirs their enthusiasm as does its needfulness. It may be a grander achievement, they freely admit, to serve a nation or to save a life than to preserve the family temper

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from disintegration during a house-keeping crisis; but the smaller achievement meets the more immediate need. If heroism can save the day for the family temper, why, heroism shall!

When they take their kindnesses in this heroic spirit, they scorn to spare themselves, still less their friends, a single smile. They are lynx-eyed in their watchfulness to anticipate the wishes of those about them; they delight in the position of confidante and adviser, which gives them a chance to be anxious about other people's lives, as well as their own; they love to make others comfortable, even — perhaps especially! — at the cost of discomfort to themselves. Their social kindness is just as strenuous. Think of the originality, industry, and devotion that go into the making of a successful dinner-

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party, a little gift, even a note! But add to these duties the acknowledgments, and retorts courteous, and counter-attacks of festivities, that follow one another as the day the night; the soul must needs be made of heroic stuff that pursues such a course!

By theories of sentiment, it should be sweet to have one's wishes anticipated, and one's comfort looked out for, and to have one's career the object of solicitude; but in actuality there are times when these gracious services are suspiciously like meddling. Some things there are, as none know better than women, that people would prefer to do for themselves, even tardily or imperfectly. Who, for example, wants to be deprived of the anticipatory joy of cutting the leaves of his own magazine, or the reminiscent and wholly

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egotistic one of setting his desk in his own kind of order? Even my child cherishes her notion of independence; she insists upon dressing her dolly herself, though Mary Jane's always questionable beauty is not enhanced by her unpracticed fingers. Moreover, the familiar adage of "one man's meat, another's poison," applies in kindness no less than elsewhere. It is with a show of reason that people are as distrustful of the advice of others as they are of their ways of comfort. A cushiony corner, which is a flowery bed of ease to one, puts another to the torture; and a line of action which is perfectly comprehensible, even sagacious, on the part of one, would be sheer foolhardiness in another. Kindness that is not wanted, no matter how modest and endurable in itself, is no kindness; and

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people who go about thrusting their kindly offices upon others do not always get the thanks they deserve.

Or expect. For kindness and altruism are not the same thing. Gratitude is precisely what those who practice excessive kindness are working for, and they are willing to go to great trouble to win it. They multiply their kindnesses not only because they wish to be kind, but because they sniff from afar the incense of gratitude, and it is as breath to their nostrils. They indulge in kindness as they might in dancing or sport, because it makes them appear to advantage. Their kind deeds are a background against which they stand out as figures of magnanimity — and usefulness; and if they seem pleased with themselves, there is some excuse for that in the homage of thanks they receive!

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Being grateful, on the other hand, is rather an ungrateful business. For one thing, it offers no scope for originality. It is n't that we hate to feel grateful, or that we hate to say so; but that there are so few ways of saying it. The wittiest can say no more than "thank you," and the stupidest no less. It is just as bad, whether our gratitude is spontaneous and deeply felt, or of the mild social type. In the one case, any expression seems tame; in the other, we struggle to find some variation from the conventional phrases.

Besides, while gratitude is not incompatible with dignity, to be grateful and graceful at once is a delicate problem in manners. A hang-dog and grudging mien is as awkward as the foolish face of praise. The moment of thanks is an uncomfortable moment, at best,

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and the burden of making it agreeable for every one is entirely on the grateful. Social perspicacity is called into play, moreover, to adjust the warmth of the thanks to the size of the favor and the importance of the person bestowing it. One alleviating fact may be noted, however; and that is that every one must take his turn at receiving kindness. He who to-day pays for his pleasure in gratitude may be bestowing the favor to-morrow, and graciously receiving the thanks!

It is hard for women to be content to receive a kindness, without wanting to pay it back. When we have said our thanks in our very best manner, we still have a lurking, guilty residuum of shame, as though we were making off with something that did not belong to us. We feel that we should assert our

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equality, no less than our friendliness, by doing something just as kind. Every woman has a horror of social debt. Even while she consumes the salad of hospitality, she is planning to repay the same with tea and cakes of her own; and, if she is of a nimble imagination, she probably has her list in mind and her decorations decided upon, before she says good-bye. When she looks the gift-horse in the mouth, it is by no means with carping comment, but with a searching inquiry into her own ability to return a gift as valuable.

Broadly speaking, I quite agree with the moralist who declares that feeling should flower in deeds. He has a pretty metaphor and a harmless idea. But of his humanity I am not so sure. Why must feeling be put into the forcing-house like a pot of tulips, and made to



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splurge resplendent — and then wilt? I like better the way of a reluctant primrose that we cherished for its very reticence. Refusing to yield to the persuasions of the hothouse, it never burst into bloom all at once; but every few days it would glow afresh with a single, rosy, fragrant cluster. It seemed to know the secret of kindness.

However we may rail against being too kind, it is not easy to escape it. It is a trap quick to dig and hard to climb out of. Moreover, sometimes the only way to be kind at all is to be too kind: to deny the unwise request, give the unsought advice, tell the disagreeable truth. To dare to hurt, is heroism that many cultivators of the heroic in kindness never aspire to. That is surgical kindness, hard, but healing. Strangely, though, the temptation grows, with

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practice, to diagnose everything as a case for operation. Cruel, only to be kind, is one of those axiomatic untruths that people believe in because they find in them excuse for their own failings.

After all, the manner in which kindness or gratitude is offered has all to do with determining the degree of appreciation with which it is met. It is n't so much what they do, as Chevalier's song memorably puts it, as the way they do it. Is it patronizing? Away with it! Is it insinuating? Has it an aroma of martyred devotion, or policy, or ennui? Then beware!

A type of person whose kindness always seemed obnoxious to me, because of her manners, was the too sweet young person, depicted with enthusiasm by novelists of the Victorian era. How one does, at times, hate Little

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Dorrit and Florence Dombey and Amelia Sedley, and all their kind! The hearth-rug heroine was an officious as well as a boresome creature. Her chief pleasures in life appeared to be running to get people's slippers and bring them to the family living-room; opening their newspapers; finding the page in their books where they had left off reading; and pushing their chairs where she thought they ought to want them. Nor was it enough that the tired business man or woman endured all this gratefully; as soon as there was time for a minute's quiet meditation, she began to entertain him with "chat"! Apparently all these things were done at some cost of time and effort and sacrifice of what passed for personal plans; at any rate, the hearth-rug lady was always sensitively conscious of her own use-

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fulness. But I don't know which I felt most irritated with: the girl, with her smirking kindness, or the able-bodied man — still more the woman — who would enjoy receiving such little services as a matter of daily practice.

Of late, we seem to have developed a new manner in kindness, which is the antithesis of the hearth-rug type: efficient, off-hand, quite modern, in fact, well adapted to big enterprises and big crowds. It is brisk, exact, business-like, the kindness of the professionally kind, of ministers, physicians, social workers and social leaders. To say the worst of it at once, it is an institutional manner. The individual is chiefly interesting as representative of a class. Everybody is catalogued, as it were, with cross-references upon such subjects as failings, complaints, abilities,

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and ancestry; even tastes and anniversaries are registered, and duly commented upon by note or gift. All this is done frankly and directly, with no apologetic hemming and hawing, as though these were delicate questions; and entertainment or charity is meted out, in proportion to needs and deserts.

As a method, the modern way is both easy and thorough, sensible and just; but as manners, it is perhaps a little rough. Most people have a mysterious disinclination to being pigeon-holed; their self-respect suffers at being invited by classes, and liked under specified types. The mellowness of the old, personal hospitality, and the old, warm-hearted, unscientific philanthropy, is still to seek in the safety-first kindness of to-day.

I recall with some fellow-feeling the

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story of the shiftless husband who had always hankered to buy his wife finery. Once, having gratefully accepted a contribution of money for his family's needs, he laid most of it out upon a bonnet nodding with feathers and flowers. Her loyal gratitude, despite the yearnings of her housewifely heart for such plain necessities as stockings and shoes, met halfway his generous foolishness, and faced down his critics. Of like mind with these two, though of different expression, was the woman who regularly sold the monthly bag of flour sent her by a charity organization and bought steak. "Faith, what we need is a square male, now and thin," said she in explanation. In truth, kindness is not enough; there is a wayward spirit of independence in us all, that demands its tribute to lay upon the

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altar where dances the little spark of Joy.

It is partly because of their manners that public benefactors never get all the public gratitude they really deserve. They give, but they cannot quite give away. Ironically possessed by the longing for the continuance of their names upon the lips of the living, they hedge about their gifts with directions and restrictions that cause them to be remembered, not always as kindly as they might reasonably hope to be. I feel sorry for the futility of their ambitions, when I see the memorials with which they so frequently consign themselves to oblivion. Nobody looks at tablet, bust, or statue. The public, having carried out the letter of the bequest in placing it, cheerfully turn their backs upon it, and with zeal set

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about the business of enjoying the rest of the benefaction, as a well-earned reward, belonging to them by right.

This is not a plea for simplifying Christmas! Being too kind, after all, is quite as much a question of how, as of how much. True neighborliness is perfect in manner, because it is fine in thought. Nothing is more humble; it is kindness on a basis of pure equality. The desire to help, and the need to be helped, are constantly changing position. If one has eggs or a hammer to lend at a critical moment, the other has something sure to be needed soon or late, if only a sympathetic ear, or a new stitch to show. To a few rare natures, the act of giving is the end in itself. It is a necessary activity of their lives, to add to the happiness and respond to the needs of others. Gratitude,



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in relations like this, is one of the components of affection, not a phrase that can be uttered. One of the ennobling experiences of life is the mutual gratitude that exists between friends or members of a family, deeply felt, but often unspoken.

Such kindness can never be too much, because it takes thought. But in these days of complicated demands, the mere friendly thought has been overgrown by deeds and things. There is, then, greater need than ever of a clear space now and then in the midst of living, where there is plenty of feeling and thinking, but of speech and deed, little. Better still if such a space be bright with friendship. It is like coming out, after a hard walk through the woods, on a sunlit clearing, with blossoms dancing and birds singing around its edge.

## X

### *Pussy-cat, Pussy-cat*

“Pussy-cat, Pussy-cat, where have you been?”

“I’ve been to London to visit the Queen!”

“Pussy-cat, Pussy-cat, what did you there?”

“I frightened a little mouse, under her chair!”



HIS rhyme has a good deal to say, in its small compass. Kitty might boast and swagger, but he was all cat, nevertheless. Not even an august Presence could keep him from his sport; and the opportunities of travel and social adventure took no hold on his imagination, because in it the only thing that loomed large was Mouse. Good cat satire, to be sure; and good human satire, too. When I look at the illustrations of the cat’s return, in the editions

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of Mother Goose that come under my eye, I find him often pictured as a sort of gay Lothario, clad in town finery, and posturing at his door; but sometimes as a plain country cat, evidently glad to be free of his city manners, yet bragging of the big town to his admiring family. In the one case, the Queen seems to have been a mere incident in the course of many exciting adventures, a part of the setting of his own personal drama. That he chose, amid such aristocratic surroundings, to pursue his own game, rather than to spend his time playing the courtier, only adds to his glory as he tells the tale. The other interpretation takes a view quite different. Kit's very commonplace cat-achievement gains grandeur and distinction from the fact that the Queen's chair was the scene of it, and its victim,

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presumably, the Queen's mouse. He, among plain cats, had been specially favored. One feels sure that the next question, unrecorded in our annals, must have been, —

“Pussy-cat, how did the Queen's mouse taste?”

The diverting human truth about the story, no matter how it is interpreted, is that neither the Palace, nor the Queen's self, nor the strange ways of London, have impressed the traveler so much as himself. People are, naturally, more important to themselves than Queens or Colosseums or scenery or works of art; but alas, when they return from their sight-seeing with but one tale to tell! It seems as though they might be content to tell it, and thereafter stay at home; but the Pussy-cats are the most inveterate travelers.

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They are to be found everywhere, either enacting or relating their adventure; and that remains unchanged, though they seem to like to change the background, and vary the incidents which embellish the main theme. Groups scatter before them, and conversation fails. Yet they always manage to find listeners, who, possibly, are waiting for a chance to break in with a mouse story of their own. Very likely the Pussy-cats find a large part of the pleasure of travel in arriving home; they enjoy their momentary position in the center of the stage, and take advantage of the indulgent interest of their friends to discourse, with great satisfaction to themselves, upon mice they have met under the chairs of potentates.

Wherever you meet him, the Pussy-

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cat is a poor listener. He has no notion of conversation; he wants to do all the talking himself. Provided you are docile and attentive, he is willing to go to some effort to entertain you with his experiences; but he is keen to detect a wandering or rebellious temper, and as relentless as a schoolmaster in carrying his lecture through to the end. Picture post-cards are more of a help to him than to his audience; they save him the trouble of description, because they show pictures and places exactly as they are. But your fate is sealed, if you so much as glance at them. No such luck is yours as to turn them over for a few minutes by yourself, choosing what to leave and what to look at. He — or with quite as much probability she — sets you down before the whole collection, naming each card for you, and

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politely correcting you whenever you skip, or turn two at a time. The effect on your nerves is as though some one whistled the tune you were playing. He likes even better to illustrate with snap-shot photographs, which have a corroborative value, proving him to have been in various interesting spots in Europe by showing the spot, with him on it. Before he is halfway through, you are thankful that there are so many restrictions upon the use of the camera about national monuments.

You have to agree with your Pussy-cat friend, just as you have to let him say his say. His story is one of special privilege and private information. He will cap every anecdote he hears with one of his own having a bigger thrill. He happens to have visited towns in the very week of their most character-

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istic local celebrations; or his friends have gained admission for him to places usually barred to foreigners. This is partly Europe's fault, however. She has distributed her *festas* through the year so impartially that no matter where you go, or when, you are likely to find an anniversary celebration of something or other, to flatter you.

We have some neighbors of this sort. They have recently returned from a tour of the Far East. We watched them as they came down the street, looking exactly as they had looked when they started out, even to the neatly folded raincoats on their arms. They have adopted a uniform for travel, and wear it inflexibly, whether they are going to Paris or the Yosemite, or merely on a day's excursion around the islands. We could not help wonder-



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ing how their equipment had withstood the wear and tear of a year's travel; or whether, perhaps, their extraordinarily unprepossessing attire was not the duplicate, thoughtfully taken along, of that in which they had started out.

We knew, within limits, what their homecoming conversation would be; could almost tell how they had amused themselves at every halting-place. It would take more than a trip to the Far East to disarrange their habits! Still, we could scarcely wait for them to wash the stains of travel off, before going to see them.

We wanted some verification of our guesses, and we got it! When we arrived, they were engaged in setting forth the mementos they had gathered in their journey. The array of trifles

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gave their parlor the look of a Christmas morning. We tried not to see the show, or at least to pass it over with casual mention; feverishly we flung questions and bits of news at our friends. But in vain. They were as proud of their trophies as though they had brought home unique specimens of handicraft, snatched from a jealous world! We had no choice but to examine them, one by one, with comments that we strove to make appropriate. But there is little in paper-cutters and souvenir spoons to inspire remark. The things we saw might almost as well have been bought anywhere as in the places they did come from. Luckily for us, however, the name of the place was plainly to be read, carved, painted, or written upon each article; or we should never, and I

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doubt if the owners would, have been able to distinguish Hongkong from Bombay, or Persia from Japan.

They barely did, in their talk. Edward was glib with statistics as to altitudes and populations, and his wife with remarks upon the feeding facilities of Asia; but these geographic facts of their Odyssey being dismissed with words few and fitting, they turned with enthusiasm to the recital of their personal adventures, which, like their trophies, might have taken place anywhere.

In particular, Edward's umbrella was a theme upon which they enlarged, with shrewd Yankee humor. It had traveled with them, in previous incarnations of silk or alpaca, on former voyages; completing with this one its circuit of the globe. He told us in ex-

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actly what world-renowned examples of architecture, in as many different countries, it had been forgotten and reclaimed, till it had become to him a symbol of his good luck in travel. The umbrella itself was brought out for our inspection, looking, for an adventurous umbrella, quite commonplace. We could think of nothing to say to it; it was not even like a dog, which could at least be patted for its intelligence in sticking to its owner. As an umbrella story, the tale was undeniably amusing, but as travel-talk it gave us no light — on Korea or Ceylon, for instance — which we wanted, having read lurid statements about them in recent sea-yarns. But the talk always turned personal, in whatever direction we headed it by our questions. When the umbrella topic was exhausted, there

was still the square meal, and the old acquaintance, and the hard-driven bargain.

We could have forgiven them the souvenirs; they might have been so much worse. There might have been more of them, for one thing. But the irritating fact remained that they would talk of themselves when we wanted them to talk of what they had seen. We were aching to hear of garish colors, outlandish architecture, strange physiognomies and stranger manners; while they thought, good people, that we were concerned about them. We had gone to see them anticipating disappointment; so we went home little sadder, if no wiser, than we had set out.

The real objection to hearing people talk of their travels, I believe, is that, like our neighbors, they actually do not

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talk of them, but of something else. I remember my own disillusionment when I was a naive and optimistic traveler. I expected my fellow-travelers to be founts of inspiration and information, in the approved manner of Stoddard's lectures. I never in the least minded listening to a recital of well-known facts about a place I was visiting; I was even ready to do my share in rehearsing guide-book criticisms, and warming over local legends. But the vagaries of the postal laws were more often mentioned than those of saints or sinners, and fees and fares were more enthusiastically discussed than styles of architecture. In my thirst for improvement, I have cast scruple to the winds and eavesdropped before masterpieces; but only to receive an eavesdropper's reward. I have lis-

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tened to an absorbed discussion of the ramifications of New England genealogy, going on under the satirical eye of Velasquez' Pope Innocent; and to a plaintive tale of good intentions spurned, circumstantially related, in the face of the Jungfrau. In the Vatican conclave of marble gods, I have heard babble of everything but the glory that was Greece. Yet I live in a glass house myself; for have I not spent precious minutes under the dome of St. Mark's, arguing the merits of the tea-cakes on either side of the Piazza?

Perhaps, after all, I suffered the worst shocks when I found people willing to stick to the subject, and really talk about their travels. For what is there to gladden the heart of a seeker after inspiration, in the talk of pedants to whom an ancient church is but a

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diagram of names and dates; or in the sighs of sentimental ladies over the dead and gone past, much less their snappish rebukes to any one who dares raise a natural voice in the presence of a relic of that past; or in the skepticism of young persons defiantly "getting" culture, and fairly boasting of their ignorance?

Travelers of the Pussy-cat type have at least the merit of keeping their humanity. The pity is that the humanity is so limited, and at the same time so assertive. Yet their egotism takes different forms. I once knew an elderly lady, whose life had been a series of exciting adventures in three different countries; she had come through these with but two topics, which she introduced in all kinds of guises, — the price of commodities and the virtues of her family.



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She was no worse than the newspaper writer from a small New England city that prides itself upon its journalistic achievements, who was among those present — one can scarcely say more — at the funeral pageant of King Edward. The crowds did not in the least engage his attention during the hours of waiting, nor did their hushed patience, nor even the cause of their gathering. On the contrary, he beguiled the time by telling his neighbors on the platform all he could remember about himself, his town, and his paper. And when their politeness failed, he sat with his head tilted skyward, scanning the air for a balloon, which he said was to contain his managing editor and the managing editor's camera. When, with the approach of the procession, this finally came into view, his sense of assisting

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at a great occasion seemed complete. He traced the balloon's evolutions with garrulous enthusiasm, mingling his rhapsodies on American enterprise, and on this particular scoop in photography, with cryptic phrases that sounded like titles for the pictures and headlines for a story he would write to accompany them.

How Emerson would have enjoyed pointing to this man as an example of the uselessness of travel! But Emerson took no account of the pleasure to be found in merely being, for an hour, part of a great show. Think of the joy, to a Pussy-cat traveler, of talking about home, and one's self, at a king's funeral! — to say nothing of the joy of talking about one's self, and a king's funeral, at home!

As a matter of fact, in spite of Emer-

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son, what a man gets from travel is not what he takes to it. The real measure of a journey's worth is not even what he is able to report in the autobiographic accounts of his journey while his memory of it is still vividly sharp. From my stay-at-home point of view, at least, the test is the social one of conversation. What is the returned traveler able to add to the interest of an hour of talk? Anecdote, allusion, and stray reference can dampen the spirits of a group into flabby conventionalism. Or they can fire the imagination, set wits a-play, and stretch a bond of common feeling between strangers. Let me have no Pussy-cat talk around my fire!

## XI

### *Ragbags and Relics*



HERE is an attic in our house. With no feeling of condescension toward those who have none, still less of envy toward those who boast a bigger one, I may say that we are proud of our possession. It is a real attic, not a locker in the basement, nor a storeroom on the top floor. Its rafters show, the chimneys climb up to the roof in structural frankness, its corners are dim, and a slender chink or two in the wall lets streaks of unaccountable sunshine fall across the floor.

Its interest for us does not lie in the romantic or mysterious relics of past generations, for none are there. In fact,

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we like it all the better that its contents have found their way to this asylum within our own memory. Externally it is quite commonplace, hardly worth a second visit to any one but ourselves. But to us its charm is perennial and thrilling. Crippled chairs and tables that have witnessed many an important interview are its furniture; its decorations, pictures that we no longer like to look at and keepsakes of forgotten significance, not to speak of broken vases, cupless saucers, and what was flatteringly known as bric-à-brac; its treasure, all manner of things that we don't want, but would n't think of throwing away.

From nails here and there dangle heavy ghostly-looking bags, and drooping garments that flutter in the draft. Rows of boxes, chests, and trunks stand

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under the eaves, gathering dust unhindered from spring until fall and from fall until spring again. A saddle picturesquely strides a beam in one dim corner; in another leans a guitar whose remnants of strings murmur plaintively when any one passes it by. A pile of old hats, a row of worn-out shoes, ending with some very small ones much stubbed at the toes, a big dog-collar hanging on a peg, are informal reminders of every member of the family.

And all about, lying along the beams and standing in corners and piled on tables, are the implements of our discarded hobbies. These are our mistakes. Fishing-rod, reel, and gun standing together, have a decidedly fresh and unworn look. The kit of pyrographic tools is as tidy as if it had just been bought; and the very professional-

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looking palette has quite too clean a middle surface, and too exact a distribution of little dabs of color to have assisted at the making of many pictures. Perhaps the most amusing of the new-old cast-offs is a particularly shining set of golf clubs in a much-bestrapped and plaided bag. It brings up visions of the gay sweaters and dashing hats that accompanied them in their brief career. The fascination of a game, to the lively cousin who abandoned these here, lay in bringing together a perfect equipment for it, with especially serious regard for the appropriateness and becomingness of the clothes.

Our mistakes may have served at least a part of their purpose of providing us recreation, in the leisurely business of acquiring the paraphernalia. With what zest we examined cata-

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logues, discussed makes and prices; with what humility we sought the advice of enthusiasts!

Two companionable hobbies, whose untidiness denies them a place elsewhere, are actually practiced in our attic. In one corner, near the window with the best view, hangs a bulky rag-bag. An old rocking-chair and a sewing-basket stand conveniently near; and a heap of bright-colored balls of rags lies on the floor. The work of sewing strips for rag rugs is always waiting, but never hurried. At the other side of the attic, beneath the window with the best light, stands the business-like work-bench where the craft of wood-carving goes on intermittently. It is also the family carpenter-shop. Everything that needs a touch of glue or paint, or a few nails, or a polishing, is set down



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in insinuating proximity to the bench. Sometimes they wait long for their turn; some things, indeed, have never got downstairs again, but have taken on the crestfallen air of permanent cast-offs.

To the casual view, one attic is very much like another. We all pursue our careers with the same utensils; and so they have a generic similarity, wherever we see them. But for all that, every attic is a family diary, a biographical record written in things instead of words. With unconscious completeness we give ourselves away, telling what we looked like, what we have played with, and what our tastes are.

The record is not so faint, either, as you might think; for relics that attain the dubious immortality of the attic have weathered through the discussions

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and compromises of more than one cleaning season. What to keep, and what to stow into the ever-hungry Salvation Army wagon, with haste lest we repent before we fairly get it off our hands, is a question that renews itself every spring. Only those things survive that express the strongest preferences of their owners, or the greatest intrinsic value.

Naturally, no two agree as to what that value is. One person's trash is another's treasure. One, for example, cherishes souvenirs, and another his case of minerals and birds' eggs. What interest can Caroline's collection of old hats have to Henry, who covets the space they take up for his newspaper files? These he thinks he may want to refer to, some day; and he is sure besides he can sell them at a round price

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in the course of a generation or two. Yet to Caroline the papers are simply dust-gatherers, while her hats are invaluable as types, if not as evidence of her youthful attractiveness; as well as giving a jog to her memory of incidents both humorous and sentimental. If the hats have not given way to the newspaper files, it is because something else less precious has been mutually conceded.

There are a few hours in the year when the housekeeper wishes for more agreements and fewer compromises on throwing away. Those are the hours when, after further postponement has become impossible, she takes up her dusters and focuses her attention upon the attic treasures. At other times, she accepts the valuation put upon them by their former owners. She may even

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value them more; for they somehow help her to understand her household as a family community, with individual traits that supplement, correct, and strengthen one another. But under the momentary stress of dusting, sorting, and rearranging, she would almost let the accumulations of years go without a pang. Losing her interest in them as relics, and her faith in their possibilities of usefulness, she measures their value upon a basis of the space they take up and the dust they gather. With energetic murmurs that "this is merely taking up room" and "that is full of dust," she does dispose of enough to make room for the new consignments of the season; wondering nevertheless why people keep so many things.

The real reason for the attic, however, lies deeper than the super-sensible

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person who has dispensed with hers ever bothers to look, in a common impulse of our human nature. Some housewives call it thrift to hoard their cast-off possessions; some save them out of sentiment; and many save instinctively without trying to explain it. But at the bottom of all saving, I am sure, is a feeling of loyalty to the things themselves. Old clothes, old furniture, old utensils, have come with time to have a response for our moods; and when we can no longer use them, we prefer to put them away rather than throw them away.

The housekeeper combines with her sentiment a more practical motive. She finds a pleasure of possession in contemplating her salvage quite as keen as that she feels in acquiring new and unworn equipment. These are her re-

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sources against a rainy day; her answers to whatever hypothetical needs may arise. With these at her back, she will never be asked in vain for all manner of strange supplies, that their owners had blithely thrown out and forgotten, when the first need for them was past. Here is her wherewithal to replace broken parts of things, to match and patch torn clothing, to fit out expeditions upon unaccustomed adventure.

We have all had experience of this motherly thrift. The hidden stores of the attic have been made to yield, upon demand, everything from a masquerade costume to the lid for a kitchen teapot; with a bit of history for each, to enhance our pleasure in its use.

Yet sometimes things do not look quite as we had remembered them. Can

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it be that the saddle was so cumbersome when it was put away, the bathing-suit so awkward? Occasionally we are disappointed not so much by the looks of our implements as by a subtle deterioration in their quality, from standing long unused. Perhaps we have here the reason why so many things that are sent to the attic temporarily never come back. They acquire a down-at-the-heel expression in that depository of hopes deferred, the submissive and dejected mien of things that have seen better days.

So they take their place in the grown-ups' playhouse, where wonderful repairs are still possible, if only time were no object, and where imagination finds other uses for them than those intended in their creation. Fancy dallies with the makeshifts of

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pioneers, and the inventions of the Swiss Family Robinson. We would rejoice to share the fate of Crusoe if we could have the contents of the attic on the island with us!

Keeping mementoes is a habit we usually ascribe to young people; but a good many go on with it all their lives. There is a precision about it that is pleasing to the methodical — satisfying their impulse to classify, label, and tie up in packages. But the keepsakes never were worth the trouble; they never had anything to recommend them but association, and that is dimmed by time. After a few years in the attic they become simply so many unrecognizable trifles, faded and brittle, whose only effect on the beholder is to make him sneeze. They are reminders of nothing, now; the episodes



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they commemorate can scarcely be recalled, even with the aid of labels and names. Good wine needs no bush, and great events no mementoes!

Yet we are loyal to our younger and more foolish selves. If we smile at their forgotten ecstasies, it is with the affectionate indulgence we might give to the raptures and tragedies of a child. Because our dried flowers and crumpled dance orders for a time revived in us a thrill of emotion, we hate to say the word that will destroy them; though we should probably never know the difference if some one else would only dare to dispose of them without asking leave.

I have no claim to being methodical, myself; but I used to put away for safe keeping and future reference such things as theater programs and art catalogues. However, I long ago discovered that

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they were no aid to my memory, because they were never accessible when I needed them; and that the affairs they recorded were of no great importance after all. So I heroically burned them, box, pack, and bundle.

Old letters we cling to, so long as we have attics. They remain fresh and vivid even through the lapse of years, evoking visions of their writers that give keen pleasure. This must be because people write their letters of friendship in their best moods, at moments of heightened power or sympathy or merriment. These are the true relics.

The ragbag is another family collection for which I have an immense respect. This is a feminine treasure. From its bulky depths can be conjured a portrait, a theme for a story, or the material for homely miracles in needle-

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work. There is always a little excitement in opening it and turning out the contents; for a new roll of pieces always comes out on top, and a new anecdote. It is a sociable task, requiring at least two persons to enjoy it properly.

I remember one character sketch that never failed to interest me. It was inspired by a roll of French cambric, printed with a great variety of tiny human figures, in lively action, — dancing, riding, shooting, bowing. This tiny roll was all that was left of a shirt, bought long ago in Paris by a cousin who was an inveterate wanderer. During one of his unheralded visits he had left with his aunt the gay garment, saying he had thought of her quilting when he bought it. He disappeared from the family news long before I came into it; but we never tire of hearing about him.

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When the ragbag used to blossom into a quilt, the portraits and stories were all spread out for the fancy to play with, the quilt itself being no mean picture for the eye. There is some romance about going to sleep under a family quilt!

Quilting is not, indeed, one of the industries whose passing we most regret; we could hardly expect ourselves, with all we can find in the way of occupation for hands and head, to keep up the tradition of it, since we can be much better employed. Nevertheless, I sometimes wish I had a year of unbounded leisure, so that I could try my hand at it.

Not all the relics are in the attic. Some that properly belong there are boastingly displayed to chance callers. The relics of the great, their pens and

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buttons and spectacle cases, do not as a rule afford much pleasure to any one but the possessor. And no one else is greatly edified by the sight of a bit of lava from Vesuvius, or a splinter of marble from the Forum, or a leaf from the tomb of Keats. Even he can do nothing with them after he has got them but put them in a case like so many specimens, and gloat upon them. He is lucky if his friends do not carefully avoid the corner where they are kept.

The best souvenirs are those which serve a double purpose. If, in addition to the charm of a story attached to them, or an adventure in obtaining them, they can take their place among the utensils and ornaments of daily life, they are altogether treasures. They enrich with their history the pleasant sense of living among friendly things.

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I could never be happy without an attic; but to my constant amazement, those who have none at all seem to get on very well. They are quite contented without an aureola of worn-out possessions. Sentiment for things has no part in their cheerful scheme of living. The superior compactness, convenience, and service of their chosen abodes are worth all they have to sacrifice in wealth of associations. But I suspect them of having an attic, or a substitute for it, somewhere in the background. It may be borrowed or rented, or it may be a trunk or a little box. They take care that it gives them no trouble; but they would hardly be human if they did not prize some things that had no market value.

You may have a home without an attic, but you cannot have a house

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without one. The attic may be a matter of habit; it certainly is one of sentiment. It is our energetic protest against the greedy doctrine of efficiency, which would make excellent machines of us all. The house is not a shelter, nor an office, nor an abode, nor even a home merely. It is the dwelling-place of souls. By all means let us keep our attics, and store them well with things which it will give us peace and laughter to contemplate.

## XII

### *On Being a Hostess*



OUSIN Jane is a hostess of the old-fashioned sort. When she entertains, she scorns the easy club-meeting, the rapid-fire tea, and all parties with a foreordained program of amusements, like cards. Much to her daughter Sally's chagrin, she sticks to dinner-parties and evening receptions as her contribution to the social life of the town.

"If people can't talk, or won't, they need n't come to my parties," she is in the habit of saying. "Such people are a bother. Conversation is the only proper reason for going to a party."

Yet she does not object to amusements that are incidental; even to cards



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and dancing, unless these reduce other guests, less frivolously inclined, to the position of mere spectators. And she actually courts an excuse, in the way of music, or a "lion," or even a lecture, provided it is not too pretentious and the subject is not commonplace, to give direction to the conversation. For as a hostess she is a bit of a despot. She arranges her guests arbitrarily and moves individuals from one group to another with summary swiftness, if her keen instinct detects anything wrong, like incipient boredom or antagonism; or even that one corner of the room is gay at the expense of dullness elsewhere. With all her watchfulness, however, she so frankly enjoys her guests that they cannot help enjoying themselves; and so her parties, despite Sally's protests at their formality, are always suc-

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cessful. Even Sally's lively young friends, who regard with suspicion affairs with so large a preponderance of chaperons, are surprised into having a good time; for they find the formality itself gives a welcome to their youthful exuberance of spirits, and an opportunity for their play of wit, which persuade them that they are really of some account in a grown-up world.

I believe that Cousin Jane enjoys having parties because they are purely ornamental and unnecessary. She says they are a relief from being useful. But also, and this is a reason she does not admit, she likes to entertain because of the excitement of it. She can focus upon a party all the feminine activities she delights in, and in their pleasantest phases. Preparing for it is a housewifely dissipation; she diverts daily

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tasks from the path of utilitarian routine, and turns them to purposes of pleasure. She sets her house in order, and then adds the extra touch upon it that gives it a festive and welcoming air. In planning her feast, she neglects for the time her everyday standards of nourishment, for the appeal to the eye and the palate.

Also, she admits that she likes an occasion now and then to manage her friends a bit, for their own good.

“They don’t mind it,” she explained to me once; “in fact, they like to be extracted from unpleasant situations and fitted into pleasant ones. The talker wants nothing better than to have a pair of ears for a neighbor; and some one who ‘wants to know’ is happy to be the listener. I’ve seen the most uncommunicative man telling his secrets

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to a sympathetic friend of an hour's standing; and I've known the most obstinate to be as docile as a lamb when I hinted that a little attention from him would make a neglected one happy."

I was in the position of the lady who wants to know; and I demanded further elucidation, one afternoon when she had brought her sewing-bag and come to sit with me. Cousin Jane is no needlewoman by habit; the same rather extensive piece of embroidery has served her for years, as a background for informal visits with her friends. She carries it to save them embarrassment, she says; for if she has her work, they can sew or knit with a clear conscience, and let her talk. I knitted, pausing to pick up her spool or her scissors now and then, and to urge her on.

"If, as you implied yesterday," I be-

gan, "you offset your brilliant people with dull, I should think you'd strike a deadly average of mediocrity."

"It does seem so," she answered; "except that you never can tell who is going to turn out unexpectedly brilliant."

"You know all about it in a family affair," I interrupted her. "Or in those too, too intimate groups, where the people know one another so well that you can almost predict what will be said. When I am rash enough to have a party of that sort, I find the only thing to do is to place the people who were never known to agree, so far apart that they can't possibly disagree, and then leave them alone. They are sure to have a good time; but they have no surprises for you."

"On the other hand," said Cousin

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Jane, trying to find her needle, "put one or two strangers in a group of familiars, and you find every individual becoming a stranger, with traits quite new to you."

"I've had that experience myself," I objected, "and always found it rather risky."

"That's part of the game," retorted Cousin Jane. "Those who have n't the sporting instinct won't find much fun in entertaining. Nothing is more plainly a game of chance. People are so various. We are like chameleons, with a different set of colorings, in the way of enthusiasms and prejudices, for every one we meet. And when a dozen, or a hundred, of those prejudices and enthusiasms come together, anything might happen! Guests are simply so many possibilities. A hostess makes

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combinations that seem to promise well, and then watches the reactions, and changes her groups at the first indication of anything wrong. I've had to rearrange a dinner-table at the last minute, from little signs I caught while we were waiting."

I accused Cousin Jane of being a psychologist; but she disclaimed any such ambition.

"It's merely common sense!" she asserted. "What people say is so small a part of what they are, that we have to find out about them for ourselves; we treat them on the basis of our discoveries, rather than of any information they give us. It's the method women have always used."

At the moment I could no more than smile abstractedly, being rather busy with binding off. When I spoke, it was

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in response to a query that had sprung up in my own mind.

“After all,” I reflected, “I can’t see that being a hostess means anything very different than I used to think, when I considered her chief function was to provide all the awkward youths and uninteresting girls with partners. It really is her hospitable task to bring the solemn ones out of their corners, and set them a-smiling; and to induce the cheerful monologist, without hurting his feelings, to give the others a chance to talk. Besides that, while keeping herself quite detached, she apologizes for the peculiarities of her friends, explains away their little stupidities, and smooths out their little tempers. She is only a kind of social go-between.”

“I don’t object to being a go-between,” said Cousin Jane, “if you let



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me do the things you mention, and one or two more. I like having a finger in their little pies! I like the game of making people get on together when they have privately determined not to! And I enjoy placing two contrasting temperaments side by side, just as I would blending colors. I'm not so sure of my results, however. For example Judge Wells gave me a surprise, the other evening. You know how much he and Mrs. Dayton have worked together in civic and charitable affairs? And how far he would be from admiring Alice Wetherall's type? Well, I positively had to rescue Mrs. Dayton from him, surprised and quite indignant. It appeared he had flatly contradicted every opinion she expressed, and then yawned at her! For revenge, I casually dropped Alice Wetherall at his side. I hardly

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dared to look back, but when I did, there they were, enjoying themselves hugely; and he was in his most charming humor when I tore him away, half an hour later!"

"The trouble was n't so much with Judge Wells, as with Mrs. Dayton," I ventured. "He was there to be amused and it took a sense of the frivolity of life to do it. Mrs. Dayton is fine, I admit; but she has too much conscience to be amusing."

"Mrs. Dayton is an admirable dinner-guest, on the other hand," said Cousin Jane. "She acts as a balance, if the talk becomes too flighty, to bring it back to a safe level. When a topic threatens danger, I toss it to her. I can count on her, every time, to find something sane and clever to say, which will start them all off again on fresh

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subjects. Dinner hostesses could n't get on without the Mrs. Daytons."

"You're a terrible little tyrant," said I, "sitting up there at the head of your table, Cousin Jane! You know you are! You put in a modest word here, and a mild question there; and we all think, what a pleasant party, and how witty or wise every one is; and we suppose it is due to us. But all the time you sit there and boss us! You are the interlocutor," I added rather maliciously, "and of course Cousin John is 'bones.' I confess I like your shows, though."

"And I don't mind your names," returned Cousin Jane, not in the least disturbed. "Everything is more or less of a show, — don't you think? — that has a touch of art about it."

"But not all shows are art," said I, "club meetings for instance. I have

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always thought those were rather hard on the hostess. She has to spend as much energy getting ready for one as for a real party; yet she can't lift a finger to save her guests from boring one another to death! She makes her house immaculate, and offers the latest thing in decorations, prizes and dainties; and then, having said how-do-you-do, she relapses into a mere member, with no responsibility, and what is worse, no power. The game or program goes on automatically; and she might better be somewhere else, really enjoying herself."

"You need n't tell me anything about clubs!" exclaimed Cousin Jane, with energy. "Did n't Sally 'have' her art club, the other day?"

"Did it go off well?" I inquired idly. Having said my say about clubs, I was not much exercised about Sally's.

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“Sally thought it did; but that’s the worst of it. I’m ashamed of her satisfaction with it!”

“I suppose it all depended upon who gave the paper,” said I. “I always try to choose the most promising program of the winter, for my meeting.”

“Sally was n’t so wise; she chose a convenient date. I don’t go to clubs often; so I was as exasperated as you can imagine with the whole performance. To begin with, the paper was mumbled, rather than read. It may have been very good, but nobody around me knew it! Of course, being a hostess, *ex-officio*, I sat in the hall; and the reader’s voice had to turn two corners to reach us. Then they had a discussion, though why they call it that, I can’t see! It consisted of two other short papers on the main subject, also

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mumbled. You could hear the sigh of relief when they were finished; but there was applause, just the same. Does anything sound more half-hearted than that pitter-patter of kid gloves?"

I saw that Cousin Jane was really roused. Her hospitable pride had been touched.

"But they usually talk at tea?" I submitted.

"They did! Their tongues were loosed upon every subject but that of the day's meeting. They talked about clothes, and people, and appointments. But 'How's your mother?' and 'So sorry I missed you!' are not conversation. It costs time and intellectual exertion merely to establish conversation, let alone carry it on! And, to all appearances, those were the two things nobody had to spare. I was as unimag-

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inative as any of them. I went around being sorry I'd missed them and affably inquiring after mothers, till I ticked it out like an adding machine. I told Sally afterward, that if they thought there was any real sociability in that kind of affair, they were greatly mistaken. They were all trying to shirk a social duty, and to enjoy themselves without any effort."

"You put sociability on a pretty high level, Cousin Jane," said I, striving to detain her as she rose to go.

Now, Cousin Jane is not one to prolong a visit with her hand on the door-knob. One leave-taking is enough for her. With her customary decision she gathered up her belongings.

"Human sociability ought to be somewhat more intelligent than farm-yard chatter; don't you think so?" she

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asked, laughing. "The sociability that is a mere exchange of facts, or worries, or complaints, or — worst of all — of jokes, will doubtless continue to be popular without my aid. Give me a few choice spirits exchanging thoughts, or beliefs, or theories, or whimsicalities, or even differences of opinion, and I am satisfied with my party. But one never comes to the end of theorizing! I may as well leave off now, as half an hour later. Good-bye; and remember, you are coming to dinner to-morrow."

I thought admiringly of Cousin Jane's tact as hostess. She is the corollary of her own theory. Conversation such as she talks of, does not bloom in a desert, nor in a swamp, nor on a storm-swept hillside. It is a flower of a sheltered and a sunlit atmosphere, the expression of minds happy and at ease.



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To make the world of the hour a bright and pleasant place, where only the good can enter, and where no one need distrust himself or be niggardly of his gifts — that is the essence of a woman's hospitality, as Cousin Jane practices it.





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